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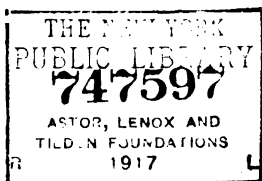
"Ydelnes, that is the gate of all harmes:
An ydel man is likē an hous that hath noone walles;
The develes may entre in on every syde."

—CHAUCER.



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DICK NETHERBY.

CHAPTER I.

AULD HALLOWE'EN NICHT.

"Some merry friendly country folks
Together did convene,
To burn their nuts, and pull their stocks
And hold their Hallowe'en.
With many a song and many a crack,
I wot they did not weary,
With unco tales and unco jests—
Their sports were cheap and cheery."—OLD SONG.

MIDNIGHT on the 11th of November, known to the Scottish people as Old Hallowe'en Night, may be a pleasant enough time to the mirth-loving crew assembled at the house of some hospitable neighbor for the purpose of jesting, romping, making sport, and making love; but it is rather a sorry hour at which to find one's self sitting alone by the smouldering embers

of a fire that has spent all its welcoming blaze in vain, and hearkening to the tick of a clock whose monotonous voice only serves to remind how long it has been heard in silence.

The bustle, the music, the din of tongues at the merrymaking, serve excellently well to shut out from the ears of the dancers all whispers of the wintry wind; the drizzling mist without, the rolling columns of cloud upon the hillside are unthought of and unheeded, when all is light and bright within. Who of the festive throng cares whether the night be rough or still, dark or starlit, so long as there is a good roof over their heads, and roaring fires flying up the chimneys? Twang goes the fiddle, pipes are relit, the bowl is passed, and a fig for the cold rain and the eerie walk home over the mountain passes!

But the solitary sitter-up at home will tell a different tale. To him, or to her, as the case may be, is known all about the wild weather which roves abroad in mid-November. Crouching over the dim hearth

unspoken to and uninterrupted by sound or motion about the house from hour to hour, the time drags heavily on; and by and by the fitful puffs of the blast without come to be listened for intently and counted anxiously, whilst the mere spatter of drops upon the window-panes is fraught with evil import and prognostications. How sharp, and sudden, and loud it seemed! Rain such as that is seldom heard, and when it is, floods disastrous and devastating are wont to follow. Hark to the wind! There will be a gale ere morning. What about the foolish folks who are like to come in for their share? Why are they still absent; why not yet by their own firesides? Twelve o'clock? Twelve o'clock only? Surely it was twelve o'clock hours ago. Hush! was that thunder?

.

It is the tap at the door for which the watcher has been listening, and it falls on the trembling ear like the shock of a trumpet call.

So at least it did in the case of Mistress Marion Netherby, widow and mother, who

on the night in question awaited, throughout the long and the short hours, the return of her only son from the Hallowe'en party, held at the Home Farm on the Castle Aird estate.

Marion's late husband had been manager of the farm in his day, and three-and-twenty years before, when Mrs. Netherby, then a smart English abigail, had attended her mistress on a round of visits in Scotland, she had fairly dazzled and taken by storm the heart of plain, sensible John whom she now invariably referred to as "poor John."

The epithet was not ill-bestowed.

Poor John's marriage proved a mistake, which it is probable that the quiet little man felt none the less that no complaint thereof ever crossed his lips, while Mrs. Marion, less reticent, allowed the fact openly. Scotland, she found, was a less alluring country to be fixed down to, and made a home of for life, than when merely jaunted through in the shooting months, when all was festivity and sunshine. Worn out with the riot and racket of the London season, she

and her mistress had alike recruited marvelously in looks and spirits during a northern sojourn, which was one long holiday. Time had flown on wings as they passed hither and thither, from one hospitable mansion to another, running up fresh acquaintances at every turn; while nothing could have been more enjoyable than the easy transits through the beautiful scenery, amidst the pure, invigorating mountain breezes. Not one rainy day had fallen to the travelers' share, and Marion found Scotland adorable.

She footed it nimbly with the young manager at the harvest-home, when in due course Castle Aird, on the south-western coast, was visited—was proud of her conquest, satisfied with her prospects, and closed with his proposals forthwith. The marriage took place as speedily as possible; and how bitterly such haste was rued, how often referred to, and how much it actually had to do with the young wife's subsequent ailing health and querulous temper, needs not here be inquired into. Poor John knew,

no doubt. But certainly, whatever faults Mrs. Netherby had to find with herself and her lot, it was not until poor John himself fell sick, passed from one stage of decline to another till the last weary waiting time was over—it was not until that act of the drama was played out and the curtain fell, that the manager's grand English wife, who was a source of mingled awe, uneasiness, and contempt to her rustic but shrewd-sighted neighbors, really knew what it was to make the descent in life she talked of having made. *Then* indeed she had to come down in the world. Her son Dick was barely twenty-two years of age at the time of his father's death, and by no means fitted, at least in the opinion of his master, to take the post of overseer thus rendered vacant. As long as John Netherby lived, though he lived to do nothing at the last, and no hopes were held out of his ever being about again by any one but himself, the appointment of another in his place was not to be thought of; no one was more thoughtfully considerate on such points than

Lord Galt. They had hobbled on as best they could. On days when the sick man was a little better, when the deceitful disease had stood back a pace as it were, and lain in hiding for the moment, there would be a vast show of doing business, and underlings would be called in, and told how to keep going for a little—just a little—till Mr. Netherby was out and about again; but, one by one, such occasions had dropped off until they had ceased altogether, and things had gone to rack and ruin apace.

It took three years and more to end it all. But the final scene came at last. The feeble breath flickered out, there was a due amount of mourning, an orderly silence, and a creditable funeral. Then Mrs. Netherby perked up her head. She had her cough and her confidence for every one, and was unfortunately ready with the latter. Oh, yes; all was for the best, she was sure, and my lord had been most kind and attentive; he had always had a great regard for poor John, as they could all testify; and now that the poor man was gone—and a great suf-

ferer he had been, to be snre—she knew who would be manager next.

It fell upon her like a thunderclap when one day news came that a big burly farmer from the Borders, Robin M'Clintock by name, with the reputation of being the toughest customer to deal with and the best man of business in his native parts, was to be without delay imported to Castle Aird to put all the tangled threads in order. Dick Netherby was to continue a simple keeper as he had been before.

She sobbed aloud. She could not contain her chagrin and vexation of spirit. Her son Dick—Dick, who was fit for any position, who would have done credit to any nomination—to be passed over thus! Oh, that she should have lived to see such a day? She had married poor John, because, poor man, he would not take “No” from her, say it as often as she might, and she had always been, as every one knew, soft-hearted; but he had never been the man she took him for—he had been no companion for her—and he had turned out deli-

cate; in short, she was evidently well quit of him, and she and Dick had meant to rise in the world. She was still in her prime, not yet fifty, and with the encumbrance of an ailing husband off her hands, and only herself and her big hearty handsome son to care for, she had reckoned on leisure and honor and prosperity for many a year to come.

To be told off to the one-storied lodge in the woods!

It was a tidy little cottage, with a pretty garden, and a good spring of water bubbling up in front. Visitors came to see the spot, admiring greatly the little plateau with its soft carpet of thyme and moss, and the beautiful view of the surrounding country which it commanded. The keeper's mother was sure to be asked if she did not like living in such a sweet place, and whether it had always been as lovely as now; also if her hand had planted the fuchsias that clustered so luxuriantly over the walls and even waved from the roof?

At these questions Marion would softly

rub her hands, bridling, and with a little cough would then strike her plaintive note, her reminiscences of "poor John," pointing out the while the chimneys of the manager's large white house, in which all her wedded life had been passed, and which—though but a dull place, as she would still aver—was at any rate many degrees better than the poor little abode to which she had been doomed in her widowhood. Oh dear, yes; it was to the Farm she had been brought as a bride; it was there she had expected to end her days when she had left her dear kind mistress, the Lady Harriett, in attendance on whom she had visited Scotland for the first and last time. "I little thought it would come to this, ladies," the poor woman would add dolefully.

CHAPTER II.

THE WIDOW'S GREAT IDEA.

Awa' wi' your witchcraft o' beauty's alarms,
The slender bit beauty you grasp in your arms;
O, gie me the lass that has acres o' charms,
O gie me the lass wi' the weel-stockit farms.
Then hey for a lass wi' a tocher,
Then hey for a lass wi' a tocher,
Then hey for a lass wi' a tocher,
The bricht yellow guineas for me.—BURNS.

AS months went on, however, things began to brighten. Mrs. Netherby was of a hopeful nature; and though it was true, and could not be denied, that she and her son had been shelved just at the moment when it had seemed that they were on the straight line to success, and that they were now leading an obscure and unsatisfactory existence, it by no means followed that they would continue to do so.

Dick was young, handsome, and clever. She laughed to herself as she saw him set

out for the M'Clintock's party on Old Hallowe'en Night; he knew what he was to do when there. She could follow the youngster in thought as she gazed silently into the glimmering peats—fancying how he would look, what he would do, and what he would say, and hugged herself, reflecting on his superiority to all others likely to be present—as she sat up watching for his return. That he staid late did not make her uneasy, beyond occasioning a fretful thrill of discomfort now and again when roused from a brief slumber by the moaning of the wind among the pines, and the dripping of the rain from the overhanging ledge of the roof. She was very willing that he should stay where he was; for had not she, too, been invited—most courteously invited? and would she not have been most happy to have gone, as she had told Miss Meg, the manager's daughter, who had herself brought the invitation—had it not been for poor John? Poor John had not been dead a twelvemonth, she reminded her visitor, and, all things considered, she had made up her

mind to keep herself to herself for a little time yet. And to be sure (with a meek drawing downwards of the lips), to be sure, what would anybody want with a poor body like her nowadays? Time had been indeed when her company had been of some consequence—when people had been kindly glad to see her, and say she kept the ball going; but now she was but a poor widow, who would be no addition to any party—just a burden, indeed—and so on, and so on, concluding with, “And, my dear, you have Dick; when you have Dick, you can’t want me.”

At the name of Dick a blush had risen on Miss Meg’s honest cheek; but nevertheless she had protested valiantly against any such self-abnegation as Dick’s mother had given utterance to, and only when the widow, after shaking her head many times had put her handkerchief to her eyes, and declared more firmly than before that to go was impossible—fairly impossible—had she yielded the point.

Why it was impossible may at once be

made plain to the reader, although to Miss M'Clintock it was entirely on the score of poor John, "who, poor man, had always been a kind husband; and although folks did say she had made no match of it, she had never been the one to cast that in his teeth—least of all now he was gone. No, no; she had done her duty, she humbly hoped, while he lived, and now she could do no less than show respect to his memory,"—but the truth was, she had no cap.

She had meant to go, had fully made up her mind to go, as soon as the merrymaking was talked of, and before ever she was bidden to it—but an unlucky accident had defrauded her of the treat. She had been trying on her widow's cap—the voluminous testimony to the regard in which "poor John" had been held—when one of the long streamers had been caught by the flame of the candle, and Marion's presence of mind alone had saved her life. She had snatched the burning muslin from her head, and thrust it in the fire without loss of a moment, and without sustaining any injury

But to appear at the manager's Hallowe'en party after such a misfortune was not to be thought of. There was neither time to get another, nor money to pay for it; and less now than ever, now that so little remained wherewith to retain her hold upon the imagination of the neighborhood, could Mrs. Netherby's rank and gentility suffer by the substitution of an inferior head-dress. She prepared her sigh and her "poor John," and refused the invitation when it came, with an air.

"Oh, yes, Dick will go, Miss Meg," she plaintively added however. "Dick will be glad enough to go, no doubt. Young folks will be young folks, and it is not to be expected that my son should shut himself up for the sake of his poor father who had been so long ailing, and who is better off now. For my part, my dear," softly nodding her head, "you may perhaps wonder at my mournings being not so deep or so broad as some would have had them; but that's the reason, Miss Meg—if so be you should happen to hear it remarked upon,

kindly tell folks why. None can say I make believe, and go for to swim in crape as some does. 'Tis never my way to be a hypocrite; and when a poor man goes, that has nothing to keep him here—and nothing but weariness and fretting from morning till night—why, 'tis all for the best. Ah, dear! yes, yes. To be sure he was a good man, but he was not altogether—"worth ten shillings more in the price of a flounce.

Such was the internal conclusion of the sentence, and as the quondam lady's-maid did not further consider her defunct spouse worth a second cap, which could not be made up at home, and which was not a tithe as becoming as the laces and ribbons put together by her own cunning fingers, she was resolute in abiding by her negative, and making the most of the sacrifice.

If the resolution thus arrived at embodied a disappointment, the disappointment was not altogether without its alleviations. To begin with, here was an opportunity, such as she had never had before, for showing to

the world how serenely indifferent Marion Netherby, who had kept the grandest of grand company before her marriage, could still be, poor and crestfallen as she was now, to the attractions of such society as was offered by her successors at the Home Farm. This was a point as to which Marion was anxious, well knowing her own weakness, and how dearly she liked to steal down to the farmyard of an afternoon, and in through that open hospitable door. But it would never do to have folks putting her on a par with Mr. and Mrs. M'Clintock. Mrs. M'Clintock was indeed a very respectable person, and Miss Meg was a fine young woman; but the manager himself was a coarse creature, and altogether it was easy to see that none of them had been brought up genteel. Not that she had a word against any one of the three; it was not their fault that they knew no better, had no manners, so to speak; it was only that, for one who had seen the world as she had it was difficult to shut her eyes to those things.



So far from having her eyes shut, it was the general opinion that Mrs. Netherby's were peculiarly wide awake at this period of her history, and that a good deal of the above-quoted flummery was designed as so much dust to be thrown in those of her neighbors; and this suspicion leads us to the second self-gratifying reflection which helped to console the widow for her enforced abstinence. She had heard it whispered that it was a piece of her handiwork Dick's finding his way so frequently round by the manager's barn-door on his homeward route from the moor and the shore. She had been told that people said she was urging on her son to court the rich and eligible Meg, Robin M'Clintock's only child and the heiress of the neighborhood.

That should not be said of her to-night.

Would she have been alone by her cheerless hearth, away from all the sport and pranking—would she have remained behind purely out of respect to the memory of a helpless invalid, whose death had been a blessed relief, and who had been gone

nearly a year, if she had been setting her son's cap at buxom Meg? Not she. If that had been the way of it, she would have been on the spot, enthroned in the largest chair, drinking the first glass of wine, and tittering over the crackling of the nuts. So at least, she hoped others would conclude; and indeed the thought of all the cheery scene made the little room wherein the watcher sat look somewhat desolate.

How much Mrs. M'Clintock would have made of her, to be sure! Upon no one did the widow seek more earnestly to make an impression, and with none did she consider herself to have been more entirely successful, than with the present mistress of the Home Farm. How should she have perceived anything else? Rob's wife, a plain working dame, whose arms were always bare, and whose apron was always on, scarcely ventured to interpose a word of her broad dialect when the finer accents of the elegant ex-abigail were in full flow. She indemnified herself afterwards, how-

ever. "'Deed she blethers,¹ an' she blethers," she would aver, "till what wi' her fine silken goon, an' her gloves, an' her langnebbit English words, I kenna gif my heed or my heels is boonmost. Aye this, an' aye that; an' mincin' up her mou' the while, wi' 'It was na sae i' *my* day,' an' '*I* ne'er seed the like, ony place *I* was at'"—mimicking. "Whaar she fins a' her clinkim-clankums passes me; an' troth, I'm deaved² eneugh wi' the hearin'."

But in Marion's presence the good woman could not conjure up a syllable of protest, and she was accordingly approved of and patronized, while Rob's gruff "Hoo's a' wi' ye, mistress?" was hardly to be heard without a shudder. He had a trick of laughing ironically when she spoke, which was worse than words. At his own house, and by his own board, however, he must have perforce behaved with decency,—and at any rate, others would say she had foregone honors and dignity on the night in question.

¹ Chatters.

² Deafened.

And then there was that rheumatic crick in her neck, which was so bad that she could not turn her head round without pain. How much more comfortable it was, or rather, perhaps, how much less wretched, to be able to nurse it in peace and unobserved, than to encounter the opening doors, wide entries, and airy passages of the big farmhouse! She remembered these with a shiver, and drew her little shawl over her shoulders as the night wore on, and the ache became worse, and the visions of gayety grew less and less alluring. She thought of Dick fretfully, and wished he would come, and yet his name an hour or two before had brought an indescribable glow over the poor foolish woman's face. She had seen great things for Dick as she had hung over the glowing embers, shaping out of their grotesque forms castles-in-the-air for her son. It was Dick who was to do this and rise to that. For herself, her day was past; she had early cast from her her luck—had disregarded the golden opportunities offered by Fortune and the ser-

vice of Lady Harriett, and had thrown herself away on a poor outlandish Scotchman, which, she took it, was little better than being buried alive outright. She heaved a sigh; but that she had often done before; and her wandering fancies went back to a pleasanter groove.

What a fine fellow her Dick was, to be sure! Who had a son like to her son? Where was there such another to be found all up and down the country side?

They might say she had spoilt him—it was like their impudence; and like their mean Scotch spirit, too, to be jealous of her poor orphan, that could not speak up for himself, and had none to say a word for him to my lord—to tell my lord he should have been manager, and would have been a manager to do him credit, too. She wondered at my lord, she did; he, at least, might have seen what was in the lad, and what might be expected of him. Young? Of course he was young; that fault would mend fast enough. And inexperienced? Where was he to get ex-

perience? He had learning in plenty. Ask the schoolmaster what he thought of Dick? A poor, mew-faced, little whipper-snapper the schoolmaster was, but he could tell when he had brains to deal with. Books? The books Dick had had would fill a courtyard. Ah, well, *she* knew, if no one else did; and it would never take her, for one, by surprise whatever good fortune happened to the lad.

"I am his mother, I confess," she would say modestly; "I am his mother, and it's not for me to speak, perhaps; but, deary me! one must say a word sometimes. I'm not the only one that can see Dick is not in his proper position, so to speak; he is throwing away his time and his talents in a place like this. To be sure, he is as clever a young man as you can find anywhere. His poor father—he was different. He was a weakly kind of person, and a different man to what I had thought him. He did his best—no doubt he did his best, and it's ill speaking uncharitable of the dead, especially of them that was good

husbands and kind-hearted—but it's me, neighbor, that Dick takes after."

"The deil he does!" cried old Rob M'Clintock when he heard this. "The deil he does! Then a' I hae to say is, he takes after the greediest, lee'inst, bletherin'st auld spirran¹ in Chris'endom—an' that's Marion Netherby," he added superfluously.

¹ Literally "spider," figuratively "old hag."

CHAPTER III.

“HOW DID YOU GET ON TO-NIGHT, DICK?”

“Dost thou so young
Know when to speak, and when to hold thy tongue?”

DRYDEN.

AT last Dick came home. He was not drunk, nor particularly noisy, but he was cheerful, loud-voiced, and hilarious, as a man is likely to be who has had a famous night of fun and jollity, and who is not often in the way of such indulgence.

He shut the outer door with a bang, and whistled the swinging air to which they had trod the latest measure as he strode into the room; but he was quite himself, a shade more lively, perhaps, than Dick Netherby usually was, but that was all that could be said either for or against him.

Of course he had been petted and put forward; he was sure to be that on such an

occasion, for when the fiery reel was over the young keeper's principal part had yet to be played—he had to sing, and sing well-nigh forever, while all listened open-mouthed, earnest, staring,—since Nature, as if in a spirit of contradiction, had bestowed on this big, rough peasant, this heavy-browed, swarthy muscular Dick, who had the longest step and the heaviest arm in all the land, a voice sweet and mellow as a blackbird's. It would thrill through the veins of his audience, and make the men shake themselves with little shivers, and pull their shaggy hair in a kind of doubtful curiosity as to the unwonted sensation. It tickled some unknown sense, which was neither that of humor nor of melancholy. They could not tell whether they wanted to laugh or to cry as they eyed each other, drawing long deep-chested breaths when the music ceased; and they would talk of Marion's lad without disparagement for fully half a day thereafter.

And on Auld Hallowe'en Nicht it naturally followed that the young songster had

kept them going merrily. He had danced and sung, and sung and danced again—and the frolicsome humor inspired by it all jarred somehow upon the drowsy perceptions of the only half-aroused and well-nigh worn-out slumberer by the fire. So long had silence reigned in the isolated spot that it seemed as if she could not now care for interruption so much overdue.

She looked round peevishly. "It's you, is it? Well, dear me, I *have* had a time of waiting. To be sure, you must have enjoyed yourself to stay so long."

"Long! Do you call it long! Not a soul left before me, I can tell you. I came because I thought you would be wearying."

"It's three o'clock and past."

"Three is it? I thought it had been more. Oh, come then, three's early."

"Early to you, maybe—not to me. And such a night of wind and rain—"

"Wind and rain? Bless my life, it's as fine as midsummer! The rain cleared off hours ago, and there was not a breath of wind to speak of. None to speak of, I say

—nothing to speak of,” as she was about to protest. “A bit blow when the tide turned, that was all. ’Tis as fine and fresh a night as I ever wish to see, and may we have many more the same.”

“I don’t know what you may call it—”

“Come and see for yourself, then. There are the stars by dozens.”

“I don’t know what you may like to say,” persisted his mother, with the doggedness of a petty mind clinging to a trifle, “but I know this, it was pouring like never so, when last I looked from the window. Many a one at your grand party would get wet to the skin, and all their fine clothes soaked and spoilt.”

“Not a bit of them. There’s no more rain to come.”

“Those that set out before you—”

“None set out before me, amn’t I telling you, old lady? they are all on the road home now, and there’s light enough for any one to see.”

“And who did you have?” continued his mother, taking no notice—indeed, she

never did take notice, except to others, of any little attentions paid to her, and though Mrs. M'Clintock would inevitably hear of the dutiful son's coming home soon to his poor widowed parent, she had not a word of praise for himself—"Who did you have? But few, I dare say, however many were invited."

"They all came, every man-Jack of them. The house would have held no more. Even the folks from the Port were there; Jean got a lift home in the Maccallum's gig."

"The idea of asking the folks from the Port!"

"Hoot-toot, mother; you are just cross with sitting up so long in the cold. How is it the fire is out? Another time come along with me yourself, and that will suit you a long way better than sitting here all alone, crooning over the old days and getting moped. I'll not leave you on Auld Hallowe'en Nicht again," he added kindly. "That's what Mrs. M'Clintock says. I was to tell you she would not take a refusal next time," which message indeed Mrs.

M'Clintock, in the fullness of a heart running over with goodwill and hospitality, had actually sent, and sent with perhaps as much sincerity as the parting civilities of friendly hostesses usually have.

Marion, however, took whole the flattering sop.

"Oh, really," she replied, her manner at once changing, and her face brightening. "Oh, really; well, dear me—I'm sure I did not expect as much. Oh, well, I'm sure; she was very kind, was Mrs. M'Clintock, to say as much. For but little good would a poor broken-down widow woman have been to anybody. Ah, indeed, the day was—but never mind. Well, Dick," quite cheerfully this time, "go on, Dick, tell me the rest. That was really very kind and thoughtful of Mrs. M'Clintock, I will say; and what did she bid you do yourself, Dick? Did she—ahem—did she say you were to go another time, too?"

Dick laughed.

"Go? I go when I choose," he said. "Meg likes me to go, mother. Meg's the

girl for me," while all at once the kindly good-humored look in the lad's eyes departed, and in its place there shone a not altogether pleasing gleam as of triumph and scorn mingled. "Come, go to bed," he added sharply. "I'm tired now."

"Go to bed just when I am wanting to hear what you have to say! And me, that has been here all night alone, and ought to be a deal more tired than any one!"

"Well, well. But I have nothing to say, upon my word. You want to hear about Meg, of course. Oh, yes, Meg's all right, never fear. Meg has the tocher, and that's the thing for me."

"Tocher!" repeated his mother, turning up her nose—for nothing, she said, offended her sense of refinement more than the use of such phrases. "Tocher!" dropping it from her lips as though it burnt them. "Dear me, Dick, what a word! why not say fortune? Tocher, indeed!"

"A very good word, and a very good thing," replied her son obstinately. "You

have taught me the value of the *thing*, and I have taught myself the use of the *word*. Don't quarrel, or I may throw up both."

"I'm sure I don't understand how it is you do talk so strangely sometimes," repeated Marion, trying not to show herself disconcerted. "I have set it before you all I can."

"You have that!"

"What has put you in such a temper all of a sudden? I'm sure that's none of my doing. I was only going to say how I wondered, after all the teaching you have had, that you should pick up the nasty vulgar sayings of the people about here."

"Pooh," said her son contemptuously; "one saying is as good as another, and I'll speak the tongue the Lord gives me, whether it be gude braid Scotch or no," strengthening his accent to confirm the declaration. "You forget I'm more than half—a long way more than half—a Scotchman. I'm Wigton born and nearly Wigton bred, and you speak to me as if I was of

another kith and kin altogether. What will you say," he added, after a pause, "if I bring you a daughter-in-law that can't understand the half of your nicky-nacky clipping English; will you learn to understand her?"

"I'll do my best," conceded Marion, graciously understanding at once this time. "I'll do all I can, Dick; and to be sure we shall get on together very well after a time. Did she—did you—did anything—how did you get on to-night, Dick?"

"Meg was fair, and Meg was kind," hummed Dick, for answer. "Meg was kind anyway," he added; "the less said about 'fair' the better."

"Kind, was she?" whispered the widow eagerly. "Kind, did you say? What—what sort of 'kind,' Dick?"

"The best sort. The sort that stands foul weather. The sort that you and I want, mother," replied the young man impatiently. "Oh, yes, she was kind enough, poor lass," he added, with a sigh. "'Tis little I have to do to keep her so. Aye,"

he went on under his breath, "aye, aye; it must go on now, for better, for worse. Rob M'Clintock was but a laboring man himself, and his daughter is not above a manager's son, is she? Surely, no. Why should she be? I am but a poor keeper—poor enough in all conscience—and she is set up and stately, with everything her heart can wish; but if I had the kist full, and Meg was empty-handed, I'd like to know who would even me to her? But Meg's a good girl, a good girl," he added hastily; "many a one there to-night was not half so spruce, nor so canty as Meg. Aye, she's good—too good for me." "Lord!" after a pause, "I wish she was better looking!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE INTERPRETATION THEREOF.

"Where there is too much profession, there is cause for suspicion. Reality cares not to be tricked out with too taking an outside; and deceit, when she intends to cozen, studies disguises."
—OWEN FELTHAM.

IT was in this way, then, that Marion's son proposed taking a short cut to honor and prosperity, and Dame Fortune, like the wily jade she is, humored the lad and smiled upon him at the outset, in the course he had undertaken.

Meg, honest, blowsy Meg, the manager's red-headed daughter, whose "frentikles,"¹ exceeded even those on the cheeks of the farm girls used to buffeting all weathers in the open fields, was very well inclined to be made up to by the handsome young keeper, who talked so grandly and sang so

¹ Freckles.

sweetly. Dick was a scholar, moreover. Meg could not make head or tail, she frankly owned, of the wonderful bits of rhyme and rant wherewith he garnished his converse and tickled her ears on choice occasions. She could not do more than smile her acceptance of these. But if they were beyond her, it needed no especial gifts nor learning to experience a quickening of the pulses and a warmth about the heart when listening to the soft refrain wherein young Netherby excelled. His singing was the sweetest music the poor girl had ever hearkened to, and only too well did the self-taught minstrel understand how to modulate his dulcet tones to every tender sentiment. Instinct and art taught him the way, he never felt a line, the dog. To accompany an amorous phrase with lowered eyelids and falling voice came easy when Meg was by, and Meg was to be courted thus:—it was not for many a day afterwards—but we anticipate.

Dick's business, then, was to turn the rich and homely Meg M'Clintock into a

second Mrs. Netherby,—to transfer into his own pockets some of the bright yellow gold—greasy, grimy banknotes, to be strictly correct—wherewith report credited the baggy pouches of Rob, the manager, to enjoy himself therewith, see the world and rise in it; then, by and by, if nothing better offered, step back again into the comfortable quarters from which he and his mother had erewhile been ousted, enriched and at ease for the rest of his days.

It was not a lofty ambition, but it was very much what might have been expected from Marion Netherby's son, and it was similar in all respects to that which presented itself before the view of Marion Netherby herself. People were not mistaken in declaring that to her might be credited the grand conception of the plan. It had worked and worked in her busy brain for long before a whisper of its existence found its way across her lips, but when at length, and with much inward perturbation, particles of the idea, inferior and detached portions of the dazzling vis-

ion, were launched in her son's presence, she was herself surprised at the readiness with which they were received. She had not reckoned on Dick being so reasonable.

But then, although a quick-witted woman, Marion could not probe below the surface. She saw the youth restless and pining, but she could not estimate the depths to which the roots of discontent had struck. She herself fretted—naturally Dick did. With his short answers and sullen brow she had no fault to find, as they sat together almost in silence during the first weeks of her widowhood and fall.

"Ah, my poor lad!" she would sigh and murmur with a kind of dolorous pride that sorely taxed the forbearance of sympathizers who came to see how Mistress Netherby comported herself at this juncture. "Ah, my poor lad! 'Tis nothing to me, neighbor, nothing to me, as one may say, what house or another I end my days in, so long as I am obliged to stop in these lone far-away parts. No, 'tis nothing to me where I hide my poor head now," wiping her

eyes. "Poor John would have been vexed enough—but he's gone, and now there's none to speak for him, nor for the widow and orphan he has left behind. 'Tis my Dick that has to be thought of now. Such a fine young man as he is to be tied down to a pigeon-hole like this," looking round with an angry contempt which refused to be controlled within the limits of the decent indifference prescribed. "I do think—ahem—yes, I must stay I do think 'tis a sin and a shame to put a poor lad brought up as Dick has been, and as he had the right to be—and poor John's son too—into a place no bigger than a pantry cupboard!"

Daily the same note was dropped into his ear.

It was nothing to her; all Marion's wrongs and sufferings were nothing, she would stoutly allege, to her; long ago she had left the world and its vanities behind in consenting to listen to a plain man like John Netherby,—but it was hard, bitter hard, on Dick.

Why, there was Hector, even Hector, the wild Highlander from the north, the bare-kneed beardy whose lingo was unintelligible,—and whose habits were incomprehensible, even he had a place as good as her boy's. Like enough he could kill the pole-cats—he was little better than a pole-cat himself. To her mind it was barely decent, that petticoat of his, not even covering his great brown hairy legs; it was little wonder he had a cough, going naked in all weathers like a South Sea African.

Well, it was not for her to speak. Providence, she supposed, would take some charge of the widow and the fatherless (inference, since my lord declined the job), and to be sure she had done all she could, and could do no more—and so on, and so on, to the end of the chapter.

Presently the ground was ready, plowed and harrowed, for the seed to be sown. Dick was miserable, and would have listened to any one, or anything.

CHAPTER V.

“DEED AN’ SHE WAS A SICHT TO SEE!”

“Affectation in any part of our carriage is lighting up a candle to our defects, and never fails to make us be taken notice of, either as wanting sense, or wanting sincerity.”—LOCKE.

LET us now go back a little.

On the first arrival of John Netherby’s successor at the Home Farm, when the first sound of the M’Clintocks’ wheels coming from the Port had been caught by Marion’s listening ear, as she waited at a convenient corner, curiosity being strong within her bosom, she had given the reins to her spleen without restraint. Envy, malice, and all ill feelings had struggled together for an outlet. She felt herself poor, despised, neglected all at once. She told herself, with stinging tears in her small bright eyes, what she had now to expect. What she would receive at the

hands of these fine stuck-up gentry, who for certain would be full of airs and above their neighbors, was plain enough to her mind; and having heard that Robin M'Clin-tock was a great man, and highly esteemed in the country he came from, she felt that he would consider he had condescended, even as she had once so considered, in coming to such a dull old-fashioned spot as Castle Aird.

Old-fashioned? Ay, it was that. But she, Marion Netherby, albeit she had dwelt there for the past three-and-twenty years—she was not old-fashioned. They should speedily find out that. It only rested with herself to open their eyes, and opened they should be without delay. They should hear her speak. They should behold her dress. They should find that on this desert shore was at least one civilized and enlightened human being.

How amazed then was Marion, on going down to make her first call at the farm, arrayed in her new black gown and cloak, handkerchief in hand, and gentility in every

step—how astonished and perturbed was she to find that all her preparations, all her time, pains, and trouble had been as completely thrown away as though she had prepared to strut and flaunt before the white owls which hooted on the fence behind the woodland cottage in the twilight.

She had washed and ironed her best broad-hemmed handkerchief, mended her kid gloves, and spent a full hour in arranging, as she said, her toilet; and she was met at the door by worthy Dame M'Clintock herself, wiping her hands on her apron, and looking as though she had never worn a cuff on her sleeve, or a broach on her collar in her life.

"'Deed, an' she was a sicht to see," quoth the farmer's wife afterwards, referring to her visitor. "'Deed, the sicht o' her prancin' up to the door, an' tippin' up to her chair, wi' yon nipkin flichterin' here an' flichterin' there, garred me lauch sae I kenned na whaur to pit mysel'. Sae dressed-up mim-mou'd¹ a mistress ne'er

¹ Affected in speech.

sat i' my muckle chair afore; an' 'twere na for her doon-come, an' that the puir thing is but a feckless body, an's like to hae a hingin' lug¹ at us for coming to her auld place, she'd no sit there anither time. Losh me! I'd no' be ill-gated at ony ane, but to see yon woman come wauchlin'² ben, wi' her upset chin an' yammarin' tongue, an' me in a kauch³ o' wark, an' Meg kirnin', an' a' the hooss wrang side up'maist,—it was mair than I could weel thole, an' ye wadna hae likit it yoursel', gudeman. 'Deed, an' I think yon Marion Netherby's little better than a natural."

The farmer had, it will be gathered, protested against the apparent inhospitality of his wife's comments. In his big comfortable way he would have had every feeble thing that crossed his path tolerated, and it had seemed to him that the relict of his predecessor had met with but a scant welcome on the threshold of her own former abode.

¹ Literally "A hanging ear," figuratively "a grudge."

² Tottering.

³ Bustle.

He had not seen Marion. He had been with his men in the fields, and, like many another husband who has not been called upon to play the host, he found it easy to exclaim, "My certie, gudewife, ye mun hae keepit yoursel' unco abeigh!"¹ in accents which showed that manners less lofty would have pleased him better.

Afterwards Rob changed his note. He paid the dame a visit, and was scared by what he saw and heard. Subsequent interviews only served to deepen the impression of disgust whilst dispelling all illusions, until at length it came to this, that the very sound of Marion's shrill voice anywhere about affected his temper, or, in his own phrase "gied him saeged teeth."²

But he had no fault to find with the young keeper. Dick neither "set himself up" in his ways, nor "niffy-naffied" with his tongue. He was, the manager owned, a fine strip of a fellow, a sharp youngster, and a lad who would rise in his business. He might not have been fit for the post

¹ Distant.

² Set his teeth on edge.

his father had held. Troth, no. That was quite another matter. "Tell ye what, freens"—here Rob would smack his lips—"tell ye what, the haill place, land an' stock, lads an' lasses, was in a hurly-burly, the like o' whilk I ne'er saw a' my days, whan I cam' to Castle Aird. It's ill lichtlin'¹ deed fowks, an' we kenna wha may be the neist, but I mun say, gif my tongue were to be bitten oot for it, that frae a' I hear o' yon John Netherby, he mun hae been nae mair gude at the heed o' a place like this than a rotten potato stalk. A pieferin'² useless crater. Atweel," with compunction, "maybe I'm wrang; but his ways will no' be my ways ony gait. Ailin'? Nae doot the man was ailin'. Ailin' an' deein' for-by. But, losh me! gif I had ae fut i' the grave, I wad kick a peat to its richt stance wi' the ither."

After which he would, in remorse for the outbreak, redouble his hearty clap on the shoulders of the dead man's son. Dick had the run of the house. The very sight

¹ Holding cheap.

² Trifling.

of his face and sound of his footfall quieted the conscience of the kindly prosperous M'Clintock, and henceforth for every real or fancied neglect of Mrs. Netherby, he did a pleasant penance when showing hospitality to her flesh and blood in the person of her boy.

This had gone on some time before an inkling of what lay beneath penetrated Rob's hard head; but at length a day came when he thus addressed his wife. "Ahem—mistress, a word wi' ye, please." She had been hurrying away, on household cares intent. "A word wi' ye," quoth the farmer slowly, "anent yon lang-legged chiel, wha's awa' the noo. I'm thinkin' he's been here the nicht, an' he was here yestreen, an' he was here—"

"Monday, Tuesday an' Wednesday," nodded Mrs. M'Clintock, smiling. "Aweel?"

"Monday, Tuesday an' Wednesday, forbye Thursday an' Friday," said Rob, shaking his head, and looking hard at her. "It's ower aften—ower aften, yon."

"Aweel, gudeman," rejoined the dame,

composedly, "it was yersel' wha bade him come."

"Bade him come? Ay, faith, 'twas mysel' bade him come. But did I bid him come mornin', noon, an' nicht? Did I bid him come when I'm oot among the neeps, an' nane but womenfowks at hame? There's gude mids¹ in a' things, an' gif I say, Gang ben the hooss an' see the mistress' ae day i' the week, is that to say I'm to fin' him fyachlin about² ilka day an' a' day lang? Na, na! Na, na, I say. There's been ower muckle o' this a'ready, there mun be nae mair."

The tone still more than the words made the gudewife open her eyes.

"An' what for no'?" she began weakly.

"What for no'? I'll sune tell ye what for no'?" rejoined Rob, with emphasis. ("Deed, an' I think the woman's bleere'ed, no' to hae seen it for hersel'"—in parenthesis.) "Hark ye to me then, mistress. D'ye think Dick Netherby comes roond an' roond for you or for me? Cares he

¹ Moderation.

² Hanging about.

a hait¹ for a twa-hand crack wi' the tane or the tither o' us? Is na it aye 'Meg, Meg'?" clapping his hands on his knees, and confronting the revelation boldly.

Nor had the manager's penetration stopped short even here.

"Ay, ay," he went on presently, and something like a sigh escaped with the words. "Ay, ay; it's the auld story ower again. But," and his brow darkened, and his hand closed, "It's no' a story I like to hear—it's no' the honest heart-to-heart tale Dick Netherby wad fain mak' it oot. He canna cheat me. It's no' for what she *is* but for what she *has*, or is like to hae that yon slippery-tongued callant comes speerin' after the manager's dochter. Noo ye hae my mind o't. Puir bit lassie! It's a sair thing for a woman no' to be bonnie—an' maistly when the lads begin to fin' it oot."

"'Deed, Meg's as bonnie as ither fowks," rejoined his wife tartly. "Bonnie, indeed!" throwing up her nose. "I wadna gie a

¹ Whit.

snip o' thread for ane o' yer smirking son-siefaced tawpies,¹ that gang up and doon castin' their e'en this way an' that; I'm for nane o' them! Gude faces are the best faces, say I."

"Like eneugh, gudewife," said Rob, drily. "Hoosome'er, I misdoot the lads arena commonly o' your opinion."

"Lads!" quoth Mrs. M'Clintock, with a fine touch of scorn. "Lads! Wha cares what opinion they are o'? Set them up for judges! What are the lads to me, or to Meg? I'm wantin' nae lads whilly-whawin² round my dochter, I ken that. Nae mair does she. They may gang their ways for either o' us."

"Dick Netherby amang them?"

"I ken naethin' about Dick Netherby," replied the dame, demurely. "Dick Netherby is a quiet, weel-doin', ceevil-spoken young man, an' there is na a wheesht against him that e'er cam' my way. No' that it matters—no' that it matters," she added hastily. "He comes an' he goes —

¹ Fools of girls.

² Wheedling.

but it's naethin' to me—he comes an' he goes—”

“Wi' a purpose my auld leddy. Ay, ye may blink yer e'en, but I'm no sae daft but what I ken a thing or twa yet. Uphaud your dochter an' ye wull, Mysie,” he added, more gently, “I'm no blamin' ye; but if it be the wull o' Providence that she should be ill-faured¹—”

“I think the man's demented,” cries his wife, losing all patience. “I'll-faured, quo' he? 'Deed, an' gif her ain fayther has his fling at my puir bairn, it's like the lave will follow,” softening to a whimper. “Wha”—sobbing—“wha e'er minted² that Meg was ill-faured till noo?”

But Rob stood firm. “I maun say my say,” he maintained, doggedly. “Ill-faured or weel-faured, Dick Netherby wad ne'er hae luikit oor way but for the lassie's siller.”

“An' shame on you for thinkin' sae.” Mrs. M'Clintock whisked her apron from her eyes. “Shame on you, I say, for a fayther, wha first wad let doon your ain

¹ Ill-favored.

² Insinuated.

ae bairn, an' neist cast a stane at her sweetheart!"

"What does her sweetheart want wi' my siller?"

"Your siller—*your* siller," cried she, panting; "your siller, indeed!" not knowing what else to say.

"The wun' is i' that airt, is it?" said Rob, quietly. "My certie, but he has played his pliskies¹ weel. Faith, I had nae thocht that Master Dick had been blawin' i' the mistress' lug, as weel as i' that o' the miss. I'm thinkin' he has coorted baith the twa o' ye," he added.

Of course Dick had, and of course the parent who had been thus won over indignantly repelled the charge. "Courted her, forsooth! It was a cryin' shame to speak o' siccan a thing! Because Dick looked in i' the byegaun, an' whiles maybe had a hare or a rabbit in his han'—'deed an' Rob liked naethin' sae weel as a roast maukin² wi' a taste o' currant jelly."

Rob heard her out. "It's a' true, vera

¹ Tricks.

² Hare.

true, an' weel thocht o' gudewife," he observed at length. "A quiet, douce-tempered lad is gude company, an' roast maukin is na bad eatin'; but am I to sell my dochter for a mess o' pottage, think you, woman? Is Meg to gang in exchange for a wheen four-footed animals? I'll get ye your table filled cheaper than that. Send Mrs. Netherby a pig¹ o' butter, or a cut o' cheese, an' that's free trade, an' a's said an' dune. What I'm at the noo's anither matter. I wad fain warn ye—"

Warn her? Mrs. M'Clintock turned round on the spot and declared audaciously that she had seen from the first what was coming, and needed no warning. She knew, of course she knew, what was to be expected. And what had Rob, pray, to say against it? Dick might be no great things, but he was a scholar, and his father had been overseer, and his mother—

"The less o' her the better," asserted Rob, grimly. "The less upo' that heed the better. Hearken to me, mistress: it's

¹ Pot.

no his fayther, nor yet his mither, I'm thinkin' o'. Faur be it frae me to cast up the shortcomin's o' his kinsfolk to ony ane, but it's the lad himsel' wha's rotten, rotten to the core. Gif I seed Dick Netherby straicht an' true, fair weather or foul, wi's heart an' saul seekin' oor Meg, for her ain dear sake an' nae ither, he suld hae her," bringing down his fist on the table with a heavy bang, "An' he suld hae my blessin' wi' her, forbye a' that moil and toil, savin' an' strivin', the swat o' my broo, an' the wark o' my hands, has wrought thegither for her portion; but whan I see—mark you, I'm no' sayin' 'gif' I see, but 'whan' I see—a lad coortin' a lass wi's e'e on her pocket, an' ne'er a thocht nor a look for hersel',—haud your wheesht then, for that's the Lord's truth, as I am here to speak it—whan I see a fair-farrend whuddin'¹ youngster coming that gait ower me an' my bairn, I'm domned if he gets plack or bawbee o' mine an' he had the tongue o' the auld serpent himsel'!"

¹ Fair spoken, false.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ONE-SIDED COURTSHIP.

"Oh, tell him, tell him that he loves in jest,
But I'm in earnest,—tell him he's unkind."—QUARLES.

SUCH being the farmer's avowed decision, and it having been arrived at shortly after the Hallowe'en party, it will astonish no one to hear that a less cordial greeting than had of late fallen to Marion was accorded her on her next visit to the farm. Mrs. Snip-Snap, as she was designated there behind her back, took an early opportunity of going down to pay her respects, and sniff out all she could, and she had pleasing anticipations in so doing.

Of late she had found herself uncommonly comfortable when enthroned in the "muckle chair," which had replaced her own more genteel couch by the kitchen-

fire. She had always been ashamed of sitting in her kitchen (a point on which John, however, would not give way), and had done her best to parlorify the room by introducing a sofa and other elegancies. She had never received a visitor without an apology, and had taken pains early in the day to inform Mrs. M'Clintock of the numerous reasons why such a vulgarity had been submitted to; but Mrs. M'Clintock had answered in her simple way, "Gudesakes, mistress, wha wad fash wi' their best room ilka day?" and had never dreamed of inducting madam into it. She had been ushered into the kitchen forthwith, had been plumped down into the farmer's own huge strong common cumbersome arm-chair, and had found, to tell the truth, that it yielded such a sense of luxurious repose after her walk, that she had made her way by instinct to the same corner on every subsequent occasion.

Betwixt herself and Mrs. M'Clintock, Marion felt with pride that there never was, never could be, any sympathy. The

feeling was reciprocal. How, then, came it about that instead of complaining as at first of her wearisome neighbor, instead of fretting beneath the burden of her society, the worthy wife of Rob M'Clintock not only pressed for a repetition of the widow's calls, but said nothing in disparagement of her or of them in subsequent conversation with her husband. It might have been supposed that having been chidden for previous lukewarmness she would have hastened to inform him of the present amends so amply made. It might have been thought that nothing would have given him more pleasure than such ready obedience to his wishes. How was it, then, that when the poor little pale-faced, black-robed widow was no longer held at arm's length, no one thought of informing Rob, and that without the interchange of a syllable Meg and her mother alike understood to hold their tongues?

Woman's wit was their prompter. For it had come to this that Marion Netherby might come as often and sit as long as she

chose in the ingle neuk, might ramble at her leisure over favorite topics, might sip her tea, or munch her cake as slowly and daintily as she pleased, Mrs. M'Clintock's endurance was proof against it all. This poor feeble creature, this "fule-like thing," had a son, and that son was about to wipe out in the eyes of the world the stain which attached to worthy homely Meg. No other suitor had ever appeared. The wealthy and suitable turned their eyes elsewhere; the inferior herd were daunted; Dick Netherby alone had fearlessly scaled the breach, and carried the citadel. Dick had cared for nothing. He had nodded his curly head in approval when first the scheme was mooted, and had set to work, half in jest and half in earnest, on the instant, and many unseen and undreamed of influences were on his side.

Meg's maidenhood, somewhat protracted as it had been, had been the one secret source of anxiety, the one ever-pricking thorn of good Mrs. M'Clintock's otherwise serene and placid life. Meg was now eight

and twenty. "It was an unco-like age—an' nae word o' a man!" People hinted that the anxious parent, as others in other spheres have done before her, had "looked at the riders, while the walkers passed by"; but if so, it is certain that she would have hailed a rider on the humblest donkey before she came to the Home Farm.

With the change of quarters hope again had awakened within the maternal bosom. Among fresh faces and in a fresh position the lassie would get a new start as it were—and at all events not a soul at Castle Aird knew her age. Dick's own had been casually inquired of him, and the answer had produced a somewhat blank expression on the inquirer's beaming countenance, since Mrs. M'Clintock held to the orthodox idea that a man should be further advanced in years than his mate,—but she said not a word aloud. Internally, indeed, she told herself anew that twenty-one "was an' unco-like age," finding it as hard that Dick should be so young as that Meg

should be so old; but the unpalatable morsel was swallowed somehow, and all went well thereafter. Dick was assiduous and successful, but to give the lad his due he did not deserve all the base imputation with which he was charged by the irate Rob. He had, as Mrs. M'Clintock allowed, been civil, and hares and rabbits had been plentiful; but he had not deliberately befooled Meg's simple parent. Somehow he honestly liked the kind dame, and practiced no deception when hanging over her ironing-board. He liked her and her pleasant genial ways, as much as the warm bannock he got from her hand at parting. He would slip his arm round her broad shoulders and take his sly kiss with a genuine appreciation of the smooth wholesome cheek, which was never withdrawn too coyly, and the proper matronly push, and the tittering "Gae wa' wi' ye, then," which followed, had no sound other than a cheerful encouraging one in his ears.

With Meg indeed he was playing a part—and a shameful one it was, but Meg's

mother had a *bonâ fide* piece of the boy's heart.

Both mother and daughter, then, were for Dick through thick and thin.

Mrs. Netherby had no difficulty in guessing why the blushing, smiling girl should hover round her chair the whole time of her stay, offering little services of love and respect. It was no mystery—nor was there pretense of one—why Marion met with such earnest and undivided attention, when Marion's son was the subject of her discourse. The mother's garrulity might run to any lengths so long as that name was the thread whereon it hung; and did she by chance or design drop that thread for a moment, the clumsiest pretext on the part of her auditor would bring it to the front again.

Meg thought it no harm, poor girl, to exhibit the bunches of scarlet rowans and purple heather placed in the window-sill by the young keeper's hands, and carefully tended there by hers. She saw no reason to be ashamed before the mother of her

handsome sweetheart, if eye and voice betrayed he had been welcome. No, indeed, why should she?

There was, it will be thus seen, a tacit understanding on the subject; and it was accordingly only natural that Marion should step down to the farm with a light step, confident of welcome, on the very day, as it happened, after the conversation took place which was recorded in the last chapter.

Fain would Mrs. M'Clintock now have closed the door; but, alas! she had no headache, no pretext for resting, no boudoir in which to take refuge, none of the elegant excuses of refined life. Upon the impulse of the moment she did indeed fly out among her hens, making believe to feed them vehemently from a platter in her hand, albeit the vessel contained little that was savory or succulent; but a moment's reflection showed the futility of such an arrangement, and brought her back to the door, striving valorously for her wanted smile and cheery greeting.

"It's you, mistress, is it? Ay, ay, an'

welcome. Ye'll be forfochten¹ wi' the hill. Come ben the hooss. Meg's doon by. She'll be—hame—the noo."

It was a failure; she could not do it. She was wondering all the time what she should say; and what, worst of all, her husband would say should he come in, as he was not unlikely to do that afternoon, and find the luckless visitor within. Her very soul quaked with apprehension as she wiped her hands slowly, lengthily, upon the roller towel in the back kitchen. She forgot to stand in front of the window, talking and welcoming as was her wont, the while her apron was adjusted and her sleeves let down. She forgot to pull forward the big arm-chair. In her perturbation, indeed, she seemed busier than ever; but it was a meaningless, objectless fuss which succeeded Mrs. Netherby's arrival; a clattering and a putting away of dishes that were in nobody's way; a scolding of the cat who was harmlessly perambulating the dresser—a creation altogether of what she would herself have

¹ Exhausted.

termed a "peyvee"—a useless, unnecessary bustle, which was meant effectually to prevent any settled conversation.

Such was, in truth, the good woman's aim, and beyond it she could not go. No wonder. Only the night before she had been, as we know, ruthlessly dropped upon by her inconsiderate husband, terrified by the extent of his discoveries, cut to the heart by his unpaternal clearness of vision, and utterly cast down and annihilated by his ultimatum. She had had to go through all this; and, with her breast all heaving with such emotions, had kept them sternly to herself, resolved that until time and thought had shown her in what way the news had best be broken to Meg, nothing of it should transpire through inadvertency; and then, no sooner had she cleared the house of her poor lassie—for Meg had presently retreated to a corner of the byre, her own peculiar domain, there to wonder and weep in company with a four-footed unobtrusive favorite—no sooner was she freed from the scrutiny of the simple girl,

whose eyes seemed already to have a shade of suspicion lurking within them, than down must needs come the very last person in all the world she wished to see. Try as she might, she could not treat Marion as of yore.

True, she sat down, and she tried to speak, but the words stuck in her parched throat. She faced her visitor, and her eyes passed beyond, and went roving down the road which led to the front door. She made believe to listen, and her ears were on the stretch for sounds from without.

Every noise seemed to startle them. And startled indeed she was, startled and breathless and uneasy beyond what Mrs. Netherby had ever seen anybody who had, as she reflected, no proper reason for being so, when it was only the lusty call of the master wanting some one to hold his horse, which made them both turn their heads, and only the woman's own husband, who thereafter appeared in the doorway, making Dame Mysie spring to her feet, and exhibit a pair of cheeks red like damask roses.

CHAPTER VII.

“AM I DAFT?”

“You are meek and humble-mouthed,
You sign your place and calling, in full seeming
With meekness and humility: but your heart
Is crammed with arrogancy, spleen, and pride.”

SHAKESPEARE.

“G UDE day t’ye, mistress,” said Rob briefly.

Chance had not brought him thither; he had not broken in upon the widow’s visit by a lucky accident; he had been riding round the country, and had taken his way by the keeper’s lodge, with an eye to the grassy paths for his horse’s feet, when it had dawned upon him that he would have no objection to falling in with Marion or her son, should they be about the doors; something might be made of such an opportunity.

Accordingly he had lingered by the way,

and looked to right and left; he had even halted at the cottage door, and had ground himself up to halloa with something of decent heartiness, "Are ye wi'in mistress?" but had met with no response.

For a few seconds he had waited pondering, then his eye had noted the closed door and window—which all at once he felt were locked; his ear had taken in the full meaning of the silence, and of the undisturbed repose which reigned throughout the small domain; his brow had flushed with a start of apprehension, and all was plain.

"She's doon by, or my name's no Rob M'Clintock!" Such had been the conviction of the moment, and although it was a natural and apparently simple one, it was pregnant with mischief to a mind already on the alert. "She's doon by, confoond her!"

He bit his lip, his thick under lip savagely; but it was a momentary passion which acted thus as a spur, and almost immediately afterwards the dark wiry eye-

brows, which had drawn together, bristling in a frown of vexation and disgust, lifted enough to show a pair of light gray eyes beneath, twinkling with saturnine humor.

"Twa can play at that game, Marion. Aiblins ye hae forgotten that, my braw woman. There's mair than you can haud their way to the farm the day. Hey-up, Jenny lass! Gang forrard—forrard, auld yaud;¹ we'll tak' the hooss i' the flank, and catch the twa o' them reid-hand. Ay, thae women, thae women!"

Somehow his wife had felt it in her bones that he would thus appear. It was the certainty of beholding such an apparition which had caused her to quake and tremble for the previous half hour. She had a wholesome fear of Rob; he was, she would have told you, the best of fathers and husbands, "a canny man, and muckle thocht o'; but there was just ae thing aboot him, whiles he wadna he guided by naebody."

"Gin Rob tak's a whimsie in's heed," she would declare, "he'll haud his ain gait—an'

¹ *Mare.*

Balaam's ass hersel' wadna turn him, let alane me. It's nae use; words are nae use wi' oor gudeman, ance he's aff doon the road he's taen the notion to."

If Rob had come to fight now, not all the nods, frowns, and winks Mistress Mysie could make across the floor would turn him from his purpose. "Losh no!" he would himself have declared. "Thinks she that I'm to be wheesht, and my mou gaggit by a wheen Punch and Judy faces! The man's the heed o' the wife, an' gif a man lets his wife crawl atap o' his barn yett, he isna fit to haud a besom-handle. 'Speak the truth, an' shame the deil,' say I, i' spite o' wives, women, an' warlocks."

"Gude day t'ye, mistress."

The words came quickly, heavily, like rain-drops before an impending thunder storm.

"Good-day," replied Mrs. Netherby, rising, in her politeness and anxiety to be on good terms with Dick's future father-in-law. "Good-day, Mr. M'Clintock. I did not expect this pleasure, I can assure you."

"Like eneugh, no," responded Rob.

"Are you not early home to-day?"

"Ower early, it wad seem, Mistress Netherby. I'm an interruption to your cracks, I doot. You an' my wife's sae thick the noo, ye canna fin' time for a' ye hae to say to ilk ither."

"Yes, indeed—I'm sure—it's a pleasure to me, I will say, to have *one* neighbor I can speak to. It's but lonesome at the cottage, Mr. M'Clintock. One never hears a voice from morn to night sometimes; and to be sure I was but little used to a dull life once," with a sigh.

"A dull life! Ahem! A dull life, say ye?" muttered the manager. Then in a louder and somewhat menacing tone, "An' what for needs your life be dull, mistress? Hae ye no your son, your bonnie Dick? What better company can ye want?"

"'Tis but little I see of him, Mr. M'Clintock, I assure you. He—"

"Ye needna assure me; I ken weel eneugh. He canna be in twa places at ance, an' it's no like he can baith be by his

ain ingle neuk an' mine. It's your turn here the noo, mistress; it's his i' the forenichts.¹ Aye the tane or the tither is upo' the groond. I'm thinkin' ye're like the wee man an' woman i' the wather glass, sune as t'ane gangs in, t'ither comes oot," laughing ironically.

("Losh me!" whispered Mrs. M'Clintock under her breath.)

"Dick has no time until evening," began Dick's mother, with an evident sense of apology being due, though she could not have precisely told for what. The half of the farmer's coarse speech had been unintelligible; and indeed she had merely gathered from the whole that in some fashion or other the young man had been found remiss.

"Time? Wha has time?" replied Rob. "I'm no compleenin', mistress,"—himself somewhat astray. "Faith, we hae a' to do our wark; an' whan the wark's dune, hame's the place. D'ye tak' me noo? Nae offense, Mrs. Netherby, but talk o' your bein' lonesome—what for suld that lang-leggit loon

¹ Between twilight and bedtime.

o' yours be aye aff here, an' you sitting your lane up yonder?"

"Why,—yes, indeed,—that is very true," responded Marion, smiling. "But sure, Mr. M'Clintock, you would not have a fine young man like my son tied to his mother's apron-string?"

("Apron-string!" ejaculated Mrs. M'Clintock, aside. "Apron-string, quo' she, I ne'er saw the apron!")

"I kenna aboot that," Rob was saying aloud. "I kenna aboot apron-strings an' thae duds. A' I ken is, I'm no minded to hae your son fyachlin roon here nae mair. Ye mun tell Dick frae me that he mun whustle his way to his ain fireside when he comes hame fra the hill, an' no' be keepin' the lassies company i' the byre at the milkin', wi'oot he's bidden. Bid him bide at hame, mistress, an' ye'll no' feel the lonesomeness; an' what's mair, ye'll maybe keep your freens here into the bargain."

("Losh me!" cried his wife again to herself.)

"I'm sure I am very sorry," said poor

Marion, with a red face, and not without a touch of dignity in her accents. "I'm sure I never thought—I little expected that my son went where he was not wanted. When I had to do without him at home, and me a poor lone widow with no one else to look to"—a tear starting—"it was all the pleasure I had left, to think he was kindly welcomed everywhere."

"Welcomed? Wha said he wasna welcomed?" Rob moved uneasily. "Welcomed? He's welcome eneugh, sae faur as welcome goes. He's welcome to bite an' sup. It ne'er was cas'n up to me or mine that onybody wha cam' by oor door—high or low, laird or gaberlunzie—wasna free to enter. 'Welcome?'"—the word had stung him to the quick. "Hasna Dick had his welcome scores o' times? and see what's come o't! He's a deal mair welcome than yersel'," he growled beneath his collar.

"Dear me!" cried Marion, brightening (the last words had escaped her)—"dear me, why then, Mr. M'Clintock, for sure I have mistaken your meaning. If it is of me

you are kindly thinking, pray don't let me be in anybody's way."

Rob laughed.

("'Sakes, haud your tongue, woman, canna ye?" His wife groaned internally at the persistent folly of her visitor. "Haud your tongue, an' dinna drive the man clean wud.¹ An' she had the sense o' a pee-sweet, she wad open her mou nae mair, and rin awa 'ore anither word is said. Oo, she's at it again!" giving up all hopes.)

"Pray, what is it you complain of?" inquired the widow.

She soon learned. She had made one lucky hit, and she was fool enough to try another. In using the word "welcome" she had almost silenced, and had certainly disconcerted her adversary, and, could she but have pressed the matter no further, Dick might have come and gone at the farm as he had done before. But with many a "dear" and "sure," with many an elegant toss of her head and flourish of her handkerchief, Marion proceeded.

¹ Mad.

Rob grew silent. It was the dumb lowering of the head before the charge.

("Ay, ye'll hae it noo!" commented Mrs. M'Clintock, in passive despair. Then she wiped her brow and lips, and sat with her hands before her, expectant.)

"Neebor," said Rob, quietly, "I thoct my meanin' had been gae an' plain, but sin' ye fin' na it sae—"

"No, indeed; that was just it," Mrs. Netherby assured him. It was difficult enough for her to comprehend the peculiar Scottish jargon, for all the years she had been compelled to endure it, and it was not her fault that—but would he explain himself?

"I'll explain mysel'," replied Rob, very gently. "You an' me hae baith been warm—"

"Why, then," cried Marion joyfully, "say no more, and let bygones be bygones. I'm sure I'm ready to forget—"

"Na, ye munna do that," said Rob, emphatically. "Forgettin' will no' do. What I say mun be *remembered*, no' forgotten.

Ye thocht I had a craw to pluck wi' the keeper for gi'en us his company sae aften upo' my ain account, did ye? Na, na; I like the lad. I hae nae fau't to fin' wi' him, but the ane. Noo, mistress, hark ye to me," his tone suddenly changing. "Gae hame to Dick; tell Dick frae me, wi' my respects, that I'm no' the auld bodle he tak's me for. He's a fine young man—ceevil, quiet—I'm no' unfriendly; but what the deil"—suddenly—"does he think I canna tell the meanin' o't a'? Am I blind? Am I deaf? Am I daft? Am I to mak' him a curschy an' thank him for the honor he proposes to do my dochter? It's Meg he thinks to gie a drink o' the Dodgill Reepan¹ to, is't? My certie! he's no blate,² that Dick o' yours!"

"I—I—I—really—really," gasped poor Marion, choking and stammering beneath the overwhelming truth. "I—don't understand—"

"Ye understan' enough for the purpose,

¹ An herb, believed to have great potency in love affairs.

² Bashful.

I'se warrant," said Rob grimly. He had had his say out, and the final explosion had now cleared the air. "Dinna be frichted but what your son will understan', tae. Haste ye, noo, an' do your wark, mistress; for the sooner ye gar Dick understan' the better 'twill be for him an' for me, an' for a'budy—an' the better freens we may yet be i' time to come."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WIDOW MAKES HER MOAN.

“But human bodies are sic fules,
(For a’ their colleges an’ schules,)
That when nae real ills perplex them,
They mak’ enou’ themselv’ to vex them.”

BURNS.

WE left Mrs. Netherby turned away—yes, absolutely turned away from the doors of the Home Farm.

Off went Marion, sore at heart, and so deeply confounded by the turn events had taken, as to be unable at first to realize the extent of the blow she had received. Never had any one been caught more snugly in her own trap. She had started for Mrs. M’Clintock’s warm fireside on the afternoon in question, with the intention firmly fixed in her mind of making matters sure,—and she had made them so in a way that had been little anticipated. All had passed so quickly that it had seemed like a dream. Half an hour before, one short half-hour,

she had been so confident of success, so secure of possessing that good thing on which her longing eyes were fastened, that she had almost forgotten this life could yield such bitter fruits as disappointment and defeat. She had tied the black strings of her bonnet into a comely bow, she had pinned on her snowy neckerchief to a nicety, and had adjusted all the component parts of her dress with a careful satisfaction and deliberate neatness in keeping with the august occasion. Then how joyously had she wended her way to the Farm, and how little had she minded that worthy Dame M'Clintock, whose sleeves were seldom down and whose gown was rarely hooked around her ample throat, was on that day, by reason of her troubled spirit, more than ordinarily untidy. It only made a comparison pleasant, Marion thought. All things, in short, had been pleasant; but, alas! the way that had seemed but a few steps in going, was a long and weary climb on the return journey.

At four o'clock she trailed in at her own

gate, tired, stupefied, tea-less. She scarce knew herself, or knew what she was doing there at that time. Never before had she recrossed her own threshold at so early an hour after a visit to her former dwelling; never before had she quitted the manager's hospitable hearth without being fed with the lusty bonnock, and warmed with the fragrant bohea. She would be bidden to help herself from the cream-pot and the butter-dish. She would be entreated to take with her a sample of Meg's goodly cakes. She would note a significant smile accompanying the suggestion—and that smile meant, "They will be the more appreciated for being Meg's."

Then Meg herself would stroll homewards, casually as it were, by the widow's side. She would see Mrs. Netherby a bit of the way back, and the bit of the way would grow and grow until the cottage itself would come to light among the trees, when—always gently inclining onwards, however—there would be a great show of taking leave, and a certainty that no more

time could be spared; and still the two would talk and talk, having so many parting words to say, that the chances would be ten to one but Dick himself, spruce and trim, would issue from some quarter or other, when of course it was but natural that he should give Miss Meg Scotch convoy back again. After such an expedition Marion would be quite content to doze away her evening alone in her rocking-chair, nor care to prepare for herself any other meal. She was not a robust woman, and the afternoon's fatigue, excitement, talking and feeding would have satiated both body and mind. She would be well content with silence and solitude.

But now, when with hopes dashed to the ground, with flushed cheek and tottering step, she betook herself, with all the speed of which at the moment she was mistress, upwards and upwards along the ceaseless windings of the forester's path, how dreary and dull seemed the spot towards which her steps were bent, and how wretched all its surroundings.

The fire was out—she had not thought of keeping it alight, considering that her absence would extend to a good three hours or more; nothing beyond a blaze at which to warm herself before going to bed would be required on her return. That could be rekindled easily—if needed. To herself she added the last words, since she even contemplated spending the remainder of the day at the Farm, if suitably pressed to do so. Matters being as they were, surely it would be no bad thing for once and away to doff gentility, and relax and make merry among the jovial M'Clintocks. The huge roaring furnace within the manager's kitchen was not in greater contrast to the miserable ashes in Marion's puny grate, than were the glowing hopes and fancies which had erewhile warmed the poor soul's bosom to the wobegone reflections to which those had now given place.

Ruefully she struck a match. Her hand shook, her fingers trembled: it was well, she whispered to herself, that Dick was not there to see. That man—that great brute

of a laboring man had driven the wits out of her head, and the breath away from her lips. Such violence, such language! Never, no never in the whole course of her life, had she heard anything to equal it. The impudent ignorant fellow! The Jack-in-office who had merely been called in *temporary* to fill her poor dear dead husband's place! Was it by him she had had to hear herself insulted? Had he even been obliged to translate to her face the very words in which he was slandering her and hers? He had indeed.

The teeth chattered in her head. She could not make the fire burn, nor the kettle boil. No, but she could rail against another woman, whose oven was at that moment hot, and whose teapot was steaming.

Presently even poor uncouth Meg came in for her share. "La! poor thing, she was the one to be pitied. Get a husband? Not she. One would have thought she might have jumped at a hunchback! And so she would, had her parents let her. Ah! the nasty, greedy creatures. It was the

money they thought about—the money was all they cared for. The money—just the money. Well-a-well! inching and pinching, and grudging to spend, even when it was got together; that was the way of the world. Well-a-well!” By and by, the outbreak of angry impotence subsided into a dolorous whine.

“My lad, my poor lad, little does he know the ill luck that has befallen him! Little does he think of the cruel welcome that’s in store. And Dick that might ha’ looked higher any day, only that—that—that—” No reason offered, but she could still shake her head and wipe her eyes. She had had time to bemoan herself into a kind of lugubrious quiescence, before the sound of a man’s footsteps on the gravel in front announced her son’s return.

He was later than usual, and even as he entered she could mark—noting his mood for the first time in her life with anxiety—she could observe that it was not one inviting an awkward disclosure. His brows hung heavily down, and the expression of

his countenance was so set and somber that for a moment her frightened woman's heart died within her, apprehending that all was already known. Soon, however, it became plain that this was not the case. Dick was surly and cross, but his first words intimated that he was also ignorant.

"I'm wet through, and dog-tired," he said petulantly, "but wet or dry, full or empty, I suppose I must away to the Farm. A fool's business, too," he muttered under his breath.

"Ahem!" said Marion softly.

"I have half a mind to stop at home to-night," continued Dick.

It was an opening, and she caught at it. "Ay, do then. Stop at home, and keep your mother company. See," cried Marion with involuntary eagerness, "see how nice it looks! The fire is burning up now, and I'll get some supper directly," rising as she spoke.

"I wish I could, but it's no use wishing. It wouldn't do,—no, it wouldn't do," said Dick, regretfully. "I'm in for it, and I

must go on with it. Let the supper alone, mother, I must go and change my clothes."

"Just stay at home, Dick."

"Ah!" said Dick, stopping short. "What did you say?"

"Stay at home to-night," repeated Marion.

"The first time I ever heard such a word from your lips." He looked at her steadily.

"Is it you asking me to stay, and I pressing to go? Stop, let me think: I don't understand this." Slowly, "What am I to stay for?"

"I—thought you were cold and tired."

"You thought more than that, I'll answer for it. Come, come," he added, but not roughly. "Come, come; let us have the meaning of all this. Speak up, old lady, don't be afraid; I aye like to know the worst of things at the outset."

She could not speak up, she could barely falter out her little history; but by dint of many an effort, and amidst a falling cataract of gestures, epithets, sighs, and groans, the truth did at length trickle forth.

He did not flush, nor turn pale; he did

not stand silent, meeting his sentence with mute, manly fortitude; neither did he curse or swear—he did what was surely an odd thing for a man to do who has just learned that a prize for which he has toiled and striven is to be withheld, that the work of many months has in a moment been undone, and that this is no momentary check, but a decision from which there is no appeal—he listened with attention, his brow cleared, his eye brightened, eagerness brought him nearer and nearer to the narrator as her tale grew in interest, and when at the close he was solemnly assured by his wondering parent that the affair was absolutely and entirely at an end—that all was over, and hope was flown—he seized the little round, closefitting cap, round which his curly locks clustered, he snatched it from his head as though in a tumult of joy and relief irrepressible, threw it into the air and exclaimed, “Good luck! that’s the best piece of news I have heard since the day I was a laddie!”

CHAPTER IX.

THERE ARE MORE GATES THAN ONE TO A
STACKYARD.

"In the dark
Our fortunes meet us."—DRYDEN.

HAD Marion Netherby let her son alone, it may be—we do not pretend to say—but it may be that he would never have shown any symptoms of inheriting her turn of character. On his father's side his forbears had been simple people, but from earliest days the baby Dick had been known as Mrs. Netherby's boy, and was considered in that light not only by her neighbors but by herself. La! she could see to the child; John had no call to interfere with it. She wished to goodness folks would not meddle with her and hers. 'Twould be time enough to give advice when it was asked for—and so on.



No other children having been born to the couple, such affections as Marion possessed—they amounted indeed to little more than the maternal instinct common to all living creatures—but such as they were, they were fastened with a blind concentration upon her solitary offspring. Petted, flattered, given everything he cried for, with every demand instantly obeyed, every fault concealed or ignored, the young autocrat soon learned his power, and was not slow to use it. His mother was thenceforth his very humble servant. Between the two there grew up a kind of contraband adhesion, in which the other parent was understood to have no part, and it was at length the favorite boast of Marion, as we have seen, that in her son she saw herself over again, and that there was not an inch of Netherby about him.

All of this did young Dick imbibe as daily bread, and the only wonder was that he grew up no worse than he did. Amidst the weeds of folly so carefully planted and nourished there yet lingered a few drooping

sorrowful flowerets, whose birthright the soil was, and whom the host of aggressive invaders had not yet been able wholly to eradicate.

The life Dick led was a curious and solitary one, congenial, baneful; it made him a dreamer, but, alas! not the possessor of lofty, soul-inspiring visions; rather the victim of busy fancies fostering sloth. Often and often he would range the moors from morn till eve without interchanging a syllable with any human being, and entirely thrown upon his own thoughts for occupation. Mechanically he would stalk onwards through rocky defiles, over windy heights, and across great wastes of heather and grass, and eye and ear doing their duty indeed, but with the mind absent at large; and that mind, who can tell whither it wandered? Poor Dick! He was often weary of himself and his lot. He sighed for change, action, and excitement. He had been taught to express contempt for his native place, and of himself he had learned to feel it. His mother would lament and bewail whenever

a hearer was by; he spoke not, but sickened at heart. His easy dreary days dragged heavily by, and it ended, as we have seen, in any means of escape being welcomed.

But how then came it about that young Netherby threw his cap into the air, and cried aloud that the news was good when informed of the ruin of his castle-in-the-air, of the checkmate to his hopes? Why did he subsequently bid his dejected companion cheer up and be of good courage, patting her cheerily on the shoulder and smiling into her mourning inquiring countenance? How was it that he fell upon the poor fare set before him with an appetite heartier than any he had known for long, while his cheek glowed and his eye burned brightly the while? Let us listen for a minute.

"I only wanted to be sure of *that*," said Dick emphatically—"that was just what I wanted to know; and if you are clear of what you say, I can soon settle the rest. But I feared the poor lass—"

"Poor lass, indeed!" cried Mrs. Netherby

testily. "I'll wager she don't think herself poor. A stuck-up, conceited—"

"Meg's not that, mother. She's a good girl, a very good girl. And a deal too good for me, that's more. But somehow I was afraid—you see she seemed to like me well enough, and I can't but say I did my best to make her like me more. 'Twas a devil of a shame, but I did."

"Well, I'm sure, 'tis not your fault, then. It is them that will not have you—not you that will not have them. Let her go, say I. Sure enough Miss Meg is not everybody's bargain, and so Mr. and Mrs. M'Clintock will find to their cost. Let her go, Dick."

"Let her go? Ay, with all my heart, poor thing. But I'll tell ye what, mother," frowning, "I'll tell ye one thing: not a word in this house against Meg M'Clintock—mind that. I'll not have it. She treated me fair and honest—"

"Treated you fair and honest!" screamed Marion. "Treated my son fair and honest!"

"A deal fairer and honestest than he has

treated her. What's the use of shamming?" cried Dick angrily. "We know all about it, you and I. The less said about fairness and honesty the better. Well," after a pause, "well, it's over at last—over at last; and I am a free man again, thank Heaven!"

"Free? Oh, yes! very free indeed, I should say," retorted Marion, provoked into an unwonted sneer. "Free to be as you were before. To plod round and round like a mill-wheel, and to sit and mope of an evening afterwards. No doubt you are free, my dear,—but folks have tired of such freedom before now."

"Like enough," rejoined Dick composedly. "And like enough that I should not be the last to do so; but there's more gates than one to a stackyard. Another may open, mother."

"Another? Well, I'm sure *I* see no other." But the widow looked round with some curiosity, in spite of the tone which implied—"It cannot be worth much if I don't see it." "What are you after next?"

she presently inquired, having waited some few minutes in vain for further confidence.

"You'll not tell? It must not go the round, you know."

"Laws! what round? Who have I to tell, that never see a neighbor but the M'Clintocks?"

"It's just them I'm most afraid of."

"And I would not set foot within their door—no, not if they begged and prayed never so—"

"Hoots!"

"You think me that mean spirited—" began Marion indignantly.

"You will be there before the year is out, mother; unless—unless," said Dick slowly and significantly, "unless you and I are far enough away by that time. D'ye take me now? Hark ye, then, and only remember this, keep a calm sough—a quiet tongue, d'ye understand? Don't blab the secret to mortal ear till all's signed and sealed."

He then proceeded to unfold a new project, which, if less objectionable in character than that which they had just been com-

pelled to abandon, could not be said to have more of ingenuity to recommend it. He had been all day out on the hills, in company with a gentleman now staying at the Castle, and Captain Thesiger had been pleased to keep up with his young attendant a conversation which Dick thought might lead to great results. The gentleman had been easy to please: he had talked and talked, inquired and commented, and it had ended in his demanding, with some evident internal purpose, whether it were possible that so fine a young fellow intended settling down to such drudgery in such a spot for the remainder of his days, or whether he would not be glad of an opening elsewhere?

"When he got as far as yon," recounted the speaker, involuntarily reverting to his Scotch, as he did in all moments of excitement, "I thought of Meg, mother, and of the fool I had been. I would have given all I'm worth—it's not much, but anyway I would have given it—to have known then what I know now. He meant what

he said, that Captain Thesiger did. And there was I—”

“Well, and there was you? What, you didn’t throw away your chance, and may never get another, and may have to stop on here in this pitiful place all your days?” broke forth Marion shrilly. “There was you? Well? What had you to say?”

“What could I say? Tell me that. What could I say?”

“You should have had off with your hat, Dick—you that have been taught manners from a child—and thanked my lord—”

“Lord? He’s no lord.”

“Thanked the gentleman humbly, and said you would be only too thankful, only too glad and thankful, to get away anywhere. And then you should have told him that you were the last manager’s son—”

“He knew as much.”

“And had had nothing done for you; no, not a thing—”

“Nice for my lord to have heard that!”

“He need never have heard. But anyway there was the chance—”

"Ay; there was the chance, and I could have bitten my tongue out that I could make nothing of it. For all the time I kept thinking and thinking, 'Oh, if this had come our way before, we could have done without old Rob's siller!'"

"You said nothing, though?" demanded Marion, caring little for what he had merely thought.

"Not a word, good or bad; but he had no encouragement to go on. I couldn't help myself. I want nothing of the girl but her gold, if the truth were out; and gold or no gold, the courting has been hard work enough these many months back. It irked me sore, sorer that I would like anybody to guess. It shamed me too, mother, that it did. Meg is well quit of a coward and a sneak—and now for the hillsides of Glanmary, and to hear what Captain Thesiger has to say for himself."

CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN THESIGER'S PROJECT.

He said,

"Be right, or wrong, what came into his head."

HORACE.

CAPTAIN THESIGER usually had a good deal to say for himself, as any one who knew Captain Thesiger could testify.

His tongue had seldom rested throughout the entire afternoon which he and the young keeper had spent together, and so well content was he with such a companion, so satisfactory had been the respectful silence of his auditor, that he had been fairly carried away by the feelings it awakened, and had nearly committed himself to more than he could well have told what; but, happily, the demeanor of young Netherby, as related by himself afterwards, was such as to impose a check. Dick had met the

overtures coolly, fettered as he was at the moment by embarrassing recollections; and accordingly, the young gentleman, unaccustomed to aught but ready acquiescence and responsiveness from inferiors, had been somewhat taken aback, and had meditated that it was as well he had gone no farther, for that it would be an uncommonly disagreeable thing to have a fellow always about him who couldn't look pleasant.

That so prudent a reflection was but transitory became, however, apparent within the course of a few hours; for having dressed, dined, and rested his weary limbs, Thesiger, who had walked well and shot well, was disposed to take a more benign view of the matter; and, indeed, his benignity went so far as greatly to astonish and discompose his host. He praised the place, the shooting, the dogs, but, above all, Dick, the keeper, and ended by abruptly inquiring whether Lord Galt would be willing to make over the said Dick to him, provided Dick chose to go? "The fact is, I am on the look-out for an upper sort of fellow of

his sort," he said. "There's that place I told you about in the North, which I am now in treaty for, you know. I'm sure to get it, and then I must have some sort of manager—overseer—or whatever you call it. Seems to me he would about do. But, of course, if you bid me hold my tongue, I'll say nothing about it."

"Good gracious, Thesiger!" Lord Galt's eyebrows rose up in his forehead.

"You would rather that such a thing were not put into his head? All right. I shall say no more."

"I—stop a moment, let me think—it is hardly right to the lad to—but you took me so by surprise. Really I know very little of Dick. His father had charge of the Home Farm."

"So I understood."

"And he might have stepped into John's shoes, only," said John's master with blunt sincerity, "only that I did not consider him up to the position. There! Now you have it. That's the honest truth; and if you like to give Dick a trial after this, by

all means do. Not for anything would I be the one to stand in his light; and one thing I can say, you will find he is a thoroughly respectable and trustworthy fellow, so far as I see. I have known him from a boy, and never found him out in any tricks."

"But he will not set the Thames on fire?"

"Oh, he is not stupid!"

"He is a monstrous fine looking fellow."

"Quite the Adonis of the neighborhood. And he can walk the hills well."

"Should say he could, rather. I don't know when I have had such a bucketing. Well, I will take him then—if I may."

"Whereabouts is your moor?" inquired Lord Galt.

"Ross-shire. Close by the big canal. Splendid place, splendid shooting; good house, and easily got at. I hope you will come and see for yourself."

He was thanked and the name inquired.

"Glenfarren."

"Glenfarren. Oh! I don't know it," said Lord Galt, after a pause. "But I don't

know much of that part of the country. I have been at Strathgourlie."

"Strathgourlie?" cried Thesiger. "I know Strathgourlie as well as I know my own hat. I'm often there. How odd that you should know Strathgourlie! The very place I am bound for next. Something prevented my stopping with them for the Twelfth." And the talk wandered off from Dick Netherby and his concerns.

"I cannot make out if Thesiger really means it or not," said Lord Galt to his son James, a boy of fifteen, on the following day. "But he has asked me to part with Dick."

"With Dick, father? What does he want with Dick?"

"It appears he is in treaty for a place in the North, and attached to it is a Home Farm like ours here, and he wants a manager."

"So you want to take on one of our keepers as manager, my father tells me?" said young James presently, having nothing better to say to the smart Captain Thesiger,

of whom he stood somewhat in awe, as a man of the world and a swell.

"As manager? I don't know if that's exactly it," replied Thesiger. "Something of a farm steward, or bailiff, or agent, I am sure to want, and I always like to keep my eyes open. My friend of yesterday seems quite the man for me. He can read and write, eh?"

"Read and write!" said James, staring a little. "I should just say so. Every Scotchman can do that," he said proudly.

"Well, that's about all I want, you know. Some one who will work under me, go about among my tenants, and collect the rents. Who collects your rents here—I mean your father's?"

"Mr. Purvis, the factor."

"Factor, that's it. That's the sort of fellow I shall need. Then it was he whom your father was talking with yesterday when we came in?"

"Oh, no," said James, laughing. "That was M'Clintock, the manager. Rather a different person."

"Oh, ah," rejoined Thesiger unconcernedly. "Manager, eh? It's all one. I shall speak to Dick to-day."

He had entirely forgotten the rebuff by which his overtures had been met on the previous afternoon, and his exultation was scarcely less than that of Dick himself when all was easily and speedily settled between them.

"But what he is really to be I cannot make out," said James, who was quiet and observing by nature. "Sometimes it is one thing, sometimes another."

"Well, it is a chance for the poor fellow," replied his father; "he is to be a head man of some sort, and that is more than he could ever have expected to be here. But I warned Thesiger," he added hastily. "If no good comes of it, Thesiger cannot but say I told him the truth from the first."

In the dullness of November at Castle Aird, Dick's promotion and Captain Thesiger's hand in it became quite a prominent topic of conversation during the long unbroken evenings. The trio were unaccom-

panied by any ladies, having gone down for a fortnight's sport *en garçon*, and when not out of doors, they found it difficult to make the time pass. Something to talk about, something as to which each could put in his word, was quite a windfall; for Thesiger's accounts of London gaieties and scandals were not interesting to the simple peer and his schoolboy son, and the narrator soon learned to reserve them for a more fitting audience. Accordingly when, after dozing half the evening, the older gentleman would wake up to the recollection that he ought to be doing something towards the enlivenment of the guest, he found it handy to start with, "Dick can break in your dogs at any rate, Thesiger," or something equally suggestive.

It did not very much matter what; Thesiger was ready to take up the theme, and presently James would insert a judicious remark, and they would manage somehow to jog along on their hobby-horse by fits and starts till bedtime came.

Glenfarren assumed quite a familiar as-

pect by and by. Plans were matured, kennels arranged, small details entered into. Under Lord Galt's guiding hand it was decreed that our friend Dick, whose province had seemed at one time to be a vague if imposing one, should finally be appointed to the post of head gamekeeper, with a dozen or two of men under him. "You will want watchers, you know, on a moor of that size," Lord Galt would decide. "Yours is a very much larger estate than mine here; I find that two men, just Dick and Hector, can do my work well enough. We don't preserve much, and luckily it is not a poaching district. Where Glenfarren is, poachers will be as thick as blackberries. All those great moors along the Caledonian Canal have every facility for the rascals. They can have their boats in waiting, and be off and away directly they are chased. Which of the lakes did you say Glenfarren bordered?"

"'Pon my word, I can't exactly tell. The middle one, I think."

"That's Loch Lochy. Well, you take

my advice, and have some good sharp under-strappers."

"I certainly shall."

"And mind and have them from a distance, or they are safe to have trokings with the people about."

"I'll remember. I shall take them from a tremendous distance."

"Hoo, it need not be so tremendous, only don't have them from the neighborhood. Have 'em on your side from the first. And as for Dick Netherby, he is a good lad, a very good lad—I don't know what his capacities are—not above the average, I imagine; but he will do better as gamekeeper than farmer, that is one thing I am very sure of. Well, I hope it will answer, with all my heart; and all I have to say about him is, keep Dick in his place, Thesiger, keep him in his place."

"I will," said Thesiger, solemnly. "I will."

CHAPTER XI.

"IT SOUNDS LIKE A HUNT-THE-GOWK."

"With what a heavy and retarding weight,
Doth expectation load the wing of time."

MASON.

NOW indeed did the Widow Netherby exult and clap her hands. She could scarce be prevented from presenting herself in person at the Castle, to offer her thanks and duty to the benefactor of her son, and, unmindful that she had always known for a certainty that his merits would be recognized some day, she scarce could decide whether to attribute his brilliant prospects more to Providence or to Captain Thesiger's good-nature. To go herself to the Farm with the news was still more a point of desire; but Dick was peremptory.

"Let well alone," he said. "They'll hear fast enough. We have no call to blow our

own trumpets, and it aye gives me a grue¹ to hear the M'Clintocks' name. Poor Meg, I'd be fain to hope she has lost conceit of me by this time, though."

If Meg had not, it was no fault of her father's.

"Hae ye heerd the news?" cried he, stamping in hot-foot with it on the tip of his tongue. "Hey, wife—hey, Meg—hae ye heerd the news? Certie, it sounds like a hunt-the-gowk;² but I misdoot it's ower true, sin' my lord says sae."

"Ay, it's true, true eneugh," replied the gudewife, whose reproachful accents needed no interpretation. "It's true eneugh"—shaking her head—"an' this is a' we get —" She stopped, for Meg was by, and not a word to Meg had yet been said.

"A' we get by haein' onythin' to do wi' a flipperty-flapperty wha's here ae day' an' awa' the neist," interposed Rob hastily. "Aweel, the like I ne'er heerd. Dick Netherby to be a grand gentleman's heed keeper, wi' a dizen men an' mair aneath

Shiver.

² An April fool.

him! Hech, sirs, there will be a fine stravin' up an' doon the land ance they're a' at it thegither! Dick Netherby to be set up like yon! Whae wad hae believed it? It passes me—it passes me. But," continued the farmer after a short meditation, during which he had looked repeatedly at his daughter and at his wife, the while he drew long laboring breaths and rubbed his hands restlessly up and down his knees, "I'm thinkin' I'll tak' second thoughts o' yon,"—nodding his head. "'Tis a queer warld we live in, an' we mun bend oor necks to the yoke o' contrairy circumstances. Meg my lass, come here."

Meg came.

"I ken a' about it, my girl," said Rob kindly. "A' about this lad wha's been courtin' here; an' gif it's yersel' he seeks, an' no your bit siller he's speerin' after, let him come to the front noo an' shaw it. We hae had words, I'll no deny,—leastways, there's been words spoken—an' Dick kens my mind; he has nought to do but cast it i' my teeth that I hae misca'ed him, an'

nane will be mair blythe to think sae than mysel'. Ay, an' mair, my dawtie, though it's faur to gang, and bitter is the blank ye'll leave ahint ye, no' by word or deed would I hinner ye o' yer wull, gif it be for your ain happiness. There noo"—clapping gently the shoulder he held—"there noo. Hoots, fie! Greetin'? There's naethin', to greet about, I trow. He's to hae ye, lassie—to hae ye wi' your fayther an' mither's free wull and blessin'. What mair can be said? The man has but to ask; an' gif he doesna ask—hark to me, Meg—gif he doesna ask the fau't's his ain, the loss is his ain, an' the fause tongue an' the fause heart's his ain. Buss me noo,¹ my bairn, an' say nae mair about it."

It is to be feared that the downcast, shamefaced Meg did not receive the full meed of consolation intended to be conveyed in the decision. Could she indeed have felt that perfect confidence in her swain which she would fain have expressed, all might have been well; but—! Alas, that

¹ Kiss me now.

"but!" She had not doubted Dick when he was poor and needy, but she trembled to think of him as rich and independent. She feared she knew not what. She shrank from the future, she knew not why.

On the very next day it so chanced that young Netherby came point-blank upon the manager as he was hurrying home in the gloaming, and that the two were within speaking distance ere either knew.

"Confoond the darkness," muttered Rob to himself; but with a mighty effort he mastered the disagreeableness of the moment sufficiently to stop and say, "Gude-sakes! hoo the days are drawin' in, Dick. I was upon ye ere I kenned ye frae the auld elm-tree."

Dick replied to the salutation suitably.

"An' what's this we hear, this clash o' the country-side?" proceeded the farmer next, in accents that oscillated ludicrously between would-be congratulation and incredulous contempt. "They say you are leavin'? The wife's been at me to ken if it's true? For ye ken fowks aye come oor

way wi' their havers, an' she's daft for a bit o' news, gude or ill."

"She was aye kind to me," said Dick, looking down. "Tell her I knew she would be pleased."

"Pleased? Oo, aye; pleased eneugh. Hum—hey—that's supposin'—it's a' true then, is it?" he demanded point-blank.

"Quite true, Mr. M'Clintock. I am only here now till Captain Thesiger sends for me."

"It's a gran' lift for you, Dick."

Dick laughed.

"And it's for certain sure?"

Dick nodded.

"Stop a wee, then," said the manager, hesitating. "Ye ken what I tauld your mither, eh? Aweel," he continued, hating the job, but resolved in his plain way to hold his ground and have it out, "aweel—ahem—ha—hae ye onything' to say to me upo' the matter?"

"To say to you!" exclaimed the young man, genuinely astonished. "To say to you! What should I have to say to you, Mr. M'Clintock? You said your say to me

—or *at* me is maybe a better word—and there was an end of it.”

“There was an end o’t? Vera weel,” said Rob slowly. “Vera weel. That’s a’, lad. I thocht that maybe ye micht hae had some triflin’ bit o’ counter-accusation to mak’—a bit remark that I had done ye wrang, or siclike; fowks is mettlesome whiles, an’ wunna thole to hear theirsels misca’ed—but nae doot ye ken your ain consairns, an’ gif it’s the truth I spoke—”

But he was alone. With an oath Dick had sprung past, and disappeared in the darkness. He had had nothing to say, no defense to make. Perhaps until this instant he but dimly realized the full extent of his baseness; perhaps it was the slight tremble in Rob’s voice, the visible anxiety to say the right thing and do his best for each one concerned, which all at once opened the young man’s eyes; certain it is that for a moment the wild idea of clearing his fame and proving his disinterestedness in the way suggested fired his bosom, and that the next the mere possibility of so doing forced an

exclamation from his mouth. He broke away to bite his lip and stamp his foot unseen, while his late companion stood still to clench his fist and ease his breast in a torrent of grief, scorn and indignant exultation.

"I thoct as muckle, I thoct as muckle. Ah, the scoundrel! First to mak' a fule o' Meg, an' then o' her fayther," finding his voice husky and a film stealing over his eyes. "The cowardly scoundrel! I micht hae spared my breath—ay, an' spared my bairn, an' no' been bandyin' words about her. Na, I micht hae kenned better. Fiend a hait¹ wad he hae o' a puir bit runtin' thing, gin he could do wi'oot her—an' he'll do wi'oot her brawly noo, dang him! The rogue, the heartless, senseless loon. Dick, Dick, an I had ye!" gripping the crook of his cudgel dangerously. "An I were young as ye are, an' nae woman's name to be named atween us—but what's the use o' talkin'?" his hold relaxed. "I canna reach him, an' sae," with a sigh, "sin' I can do naethin', there's naethin' I can do."

¹ Not a whit.

CHAPTER XII.

AN EMPTY POST-BAG.

“Many times a man’s whole stock of comfort lies in the hope of a promise, which, when it is broken, his anchor-hold is gone. It is no shame, with reason, to refuse a petition, but it is a shame, having once promised to do a thing, not to make it good.”—OWEN FELTHAM.

IF Dick Netherby had wished himself away from Castle Aird before, how much more reason had he now to bless the happy chance which offered him so speedy and triumphant an escape.

Not that he was altogether without internal uneasiness, however. He could not see the broad light stream across his path from the windows of the Home Farm, as he stepped nightly homewards from the moor, without a recollection of the many times on which it had been the beam by which he had steered his way thither, nor

could he face the farmer's pew in church without wishing his own had been anywhere else. The M'Clintocks' name, he owned, as we know, gave him a "grue," and if so, how much more unpleasant was a view of the M'Clintocks' ample persons. But youth is sanguine and volatile. A very short time was to end it all; his penance in this respect could not, he assured himself, last above a week or two, and each day's post might bring Captain Thesiger's summons.

Lord Galt meantime set to work to look out for another keeper, and before very long, it must be confessed, he found himself not altogether sorry that things had taken the turn they had. He had never, he said, thought a great deal of the boy Dick; he had never expected great things of him, but he had always until now considered his late manager's son as a trusty, hard-working lad. Trusty? Well, he supposed Dick was trusty enough, but hard-working he was not. When he looked into matters, it seemed to him that he could

find out nothing which had been done; and James, with whom the young keeper was rather a favorite, might say what he liked, his father held to his opinion.

"Show me that I'm wrong," he said. "I am willing to be convinced, I am sure; but I can't find out a single thing the fellow's good for. It is even on my conscience that I told Thesiger he could break dogs, for a worse-broken animal than that great hulking Jack it would be difficult to find anywhere. He is perfectly, hopelessly useless. I have half a mind to shoot him to-morrow."

"Which? Dick or Jack?"

"Pshaw! But I say, James, what do you think about it seriously? Is the dog of any use at all? Is he worth his keep? Shall we give him one trial more, or get rid of him at once?"

"Oh, give him a little law. And, father," continued James, who was ever on the side of leniency, "do not be too hard upon Dick, either. He is rather upset just now, that's all. Thesiger made a fuss about him, and

turned his head. Thesiger blarneyed him all day long, that he might be in a good temper and get Thesiger the best shots. I heard the sort of thing that went on once: it was not Dick's fault."

"What an ass Thesiger is! He will spoil any servant if he takes that line with him. Well, all I can say is, I wish he would look sharp and take Dick off our hands, for this not knowing from day to day what may happen the next—this hanging on and on, as we are doing now, is monstrous disagreeable. You don't know whether to treat the fellow as your own, or as another man's! Once or twice lately I should have given him a good rousing, only that it did not seem worth while, as he was on the point of going away. I do wish Thesiger could be brought to book quickly."

"But, you know we have not got another," observed James, with some of the prudence, in which, it must be allowed, his father was lacking.

"We can do without another, for a time. No one is coming down this Christmas;

and so, though I am on the look-out, I do not really particularly mind about getting one. We could do without till the spring, uncommonly well."

Another week came, and still there was no word from Captain Thesiger.

"Had you not better write?" suggested James to his father.

"The very thing I was going to say to you. I should certainly write—write peremptorily too—inquiring as to what he is about? It is not behaving like a gentleman, either to me or to Dick,—and he has not thanked for his visit here either!"

"It is very odd," said James, thoughtfully.

"Well, write and see what comes of it."

"Am *I* to write? Did you mean me, sir? Will you not do it yourself?"

"No, no; certainly not. No need for that, no need at all," replied Lord Galt, somewhat hastily. "It will come far better from you, and besides, I am busy to-day."

"Are you busy? What about?"

"Heaps of things. I cannot possibly be taken up writing letters. Just you do that, and put it pretty stiff, too."

"But—but, I don't know what to say."

"To say? Pooh, that's easy enough. Say? Let me see. Say? Why, to be sure, say that we have been expecting to hear from him before this, and that sort of thing. There is no difficulty. You need not spin out your epistle; quite a small sheet of paper will do."

"Am I to say that Dick wants to be off?"

"Well, no; that would hardly do, though I dare say it is true enough. No, you must not say that. It was agreed upon that we were to keep him on, until it was convenient to have him at Glenfarren; we must not insinuate that his presence here is superfluous now. We must keep clear of giving offense, whatever we do."

"I don't see how it is to be managed. I don't know in the least what I am to say."

"Am I not telling you what to say? It

is just what you are to say that I have been expounding and explaining for the last five minutes: say that we have been expecting a letter from him, and all that sort of thing—*that's* what you are to say. My conscience, you can't expect me to give it you in black and white! Put it into your own words, and mind you put it civilly. I would not for the world give occasion to Thesiger to think there had been sharp practice on any one's part."

James smiled. "Except on his own, sir. I wish he may not all this time be thinking what ninnies we are to let him carry off our best man from us in this way."

"Eh, what's that?" cried Lord Galt, in some alarm. "Eh? If I thought that,—but no. No, no. Thesiger's an ass, and Dick's another; there's no 'best man' in the question. You write what I have told you; send him a good letter, not too long, saying that we have been expecting to hear from him, and all the rest of it; and we shall soon see if that does not bring matters to a crisis, one way or other."

The document, towards which such valuable contribution was made, was at length penned and dispatched, but whether it ever reached the hands of Captain the Hon. Eustace Thesiger is more than doubtful.

He had given them his address, it is true—more than one address, indeed; and the houses at which he had thus inferred he was to be found were of the first water—unimpeachable. But although James Galt's envelope was carefully directed to one of these, and although the writing was clear and bold; and the capitals of the largest, it is but too probable no one was the wiser. It is not out of the question—gentle reader, prepare for a shock—that the grand house at which the missive was delivered was shut up for the season, delivered over to the hands of a butler or housekeeper, who knew not Thesiger's name. It is by no means impossible that the noble master and mistress upon returning to their ancestral seat were likewise ignorant. Thesiger was careless; his slips were too frequent, too palpable altogether,

at times. When not in company with those by whom he might expect to be caught tripping, his tongue would wander sadly at random, and his memory would grow absurdly slipshod. He would forget that distinguished bachelors with whom he would profess to have just been staying were at the moment many thousand miles away; and that if a personage lately dead were in reality his own relation, it would have been but decent to appear in mourning. He would fall into pitfalls out of very wantonness.

On the present occasion there had been an overflow of nonsense more than usually redundant, and the confidence with which he was listened to—or imagined he was listened to—led invitingly to more and more. Nobody opposed, nobody demurred; and the consequence was, primarily, that, so far as can be known, young Galt's diplomatic epistle never fell into the hands of the person for whom it was intended. Thesiger, at all events, never answered it.

Every day James went himself to receive

the post-bag. The poor boy swelled with mortification and sense of wounded manhood as day after day passed and it contained nothing for him. The pleasant apology and profuse excuses which had been counted upon at first, came by and by to be regarded with contempt. The idea that he should some morning be surprised by a large square crested envelope, and be in no doubt for a single second as to whence it came, faded away. "He must write some day, or other," reiterated Lord Galt with unabated confidence for a time. "It is very bad conduct, I allow; but he must write some day."

By and by, however, it was, "There must be a reason. He has lost your letter and forgotten our post-town. He must be written to again."

"But he will have left all these places by this time. Where can we address?"

"Address to his regiment."

They concluded, however, to wait a little longer. James was loath to compose another reminder; he hated the subject. It

was not only the daily disappointment to himself which was galling, it was the vexatious certainty of finding Dick Netherby somewhere about, so soon as he should set foot out of doors, of being obliged to take notice of his touched cap, and of being forced to reply to the unuttered demand of his eyes.

Dick behaved well, all things considered.

His torments might have exceeded those of his master, and he had no one to whom they could be with safety unbosomed, since Marion was a dangerous *confidante*; but he was patient, and tried to be cheerful. All would come right in the end, he thought. The affair was as good as settled, and why trouble about it? He was not unreasonable, and he was easy-going; he fared better than any of the others concerned at this pass.

A month passed. Some complained openly, some fretted in secret, but neither word nor sign gave Captain Eustace Thesiger.

CHAPTER XIII.

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES.

“It is hard to personate and act a part long; for nature will always be endeavoring to return, and will peep out and betray herself one time or other.”—TILLOTSON.

BY no means so silent, however, were the tongues of the neighbors. Dick disliked meeting old friends more than he minded anything else, dreaded the inevitable halt and the curiosity and questioning into which astonishment was sure to explode. While still a long way off he could mark, or fancied he could mark, the gathering surprise, the doubt which his appearance would create, and knew what he was in for. The women were the worst. They were never in a hurry themselves; never had to hasten for markets or steamboats; willy-nilly, they would have their gossip

out, were it only for the sake of recounting it to the next they met. Something of this kind would accordingly transpire—

“It’s you, Dick, is it? Troth, an’ I misdooted my ain e’en when I caught sicht o’ ye frae the hill-tap. I thocht they were playin’ me pliskies. It’s you, is it? No awa yet?”

“Faith, ay: it’s me mistress. E’en like the bad penny, you see—aye casting up.”

“It’s you, is it? and no awa yet? Losh me, lad, what’s keepit ye? Deed, an’ I heerd you and your mither were awa lang syne.”

“You must have been hoaxed, mistress.”

“Hoaxed? Aweel, maybe. But I wadna hae credited onybody but yersel’.”

“Well, neighbor, you will credit me, I suppose. Here I am, and you must make all you can of me, for”—always with the same anxious pretense of jocularly—“who knows if we may ever meet again!”

“Eh, Dick, Dick. Fy, for shame,” the gudewife would here remonstrate. “Fy, noo; siccan a thing to say! ‘Deed an’ it’s

true enough, Wha kens? quo he? Ay, ay, it's true enough. Nathless, it's no' the way to talk, maister. An' sae ye arena awa yet?"

There was no getting off—no possibility of a diversion. He could not deny his bodily presence, and so awkward was the situation that it required more of a brazen brow than the young fellow possessed to carry it off. He would shuffle his feet and look foolish, but he would aver, as lightly as he could, that his departure was at hand.

Yes, indeed, he should be off soon now, very soon—any day, in short. He was only awaiting Captain Thesiger's orders, and these had not come yet. It was just as well; it gave him and his mother time to draw breath and look about them. There was no hurry—no hurry whatever. He was sure he should not have known what to do had he been canted off to a strange country straight away.

But he was not so keen to dilate on the brilliancy of his prospects as he had been at first; and by and by he would steal off very

silently, not with a merry whistle as he had been wont to do.

"No news yet?" That was almost sure to be the whispered tremulous inquiry which fell on his ears on his return home. "No news yet?" The widow would be on the look-out furtively, uneasily; and she would speak her greeting below her breath for fear of being overheard, even in that lonely spot. "I cannot understand what it means, Dick. No, I cannot. Eh, dear me!"

But the sigh would expend itself presently, and hope again lift up her head.

"Folks must not be let to notice anything. They will be ready enough to point their fingers at us, for that we have always held ourselves above them. The time will come, Dick—the time will come! Never be downhearted. Sure enough we was taken by surprise once, and 'tis but natural we shall be taken by surprise again.

But the second surprise came not.

"Captain Thesiger is not a man of business," Dick's old master had repeatedly to explain to him; and Lord Galt made the

assertion in the tone of one whose own claim to the title was indisputable. "Captain Thesiger is a man of the world, with—ah!—no doubt, other things to think of. He is certainly somewhat off-hand in transacting affairs of this nature—all done by word of mouth—but no doubt it will be all right for you, Dick, although," shortly, "it is rather awkward for me."

James, after this, would be sure to say something kind, compassionating the dispirited look on the young keeper's face. He and his father had extended their stay at the Castle, and both of them were still there in the middle of January. He was out a good deal with Dick, and tried to take the pleasantest view of things, even though he had daily to allow that no letter had come.

"You see, of course, we are glad to keep you on," the boy would say of his own accord. "My father only means that it is awkward for him because—because—But we have got no one else, you know, so it's all right."



"Of course; oh yes, it's all right!" But this time the speaker's tone was not so cordial. "For," Lord Galt would presently explain to his son, "for how long this is to last Heaven knows! *I* see no end to it. Here are you and I just going away, and nothing settled. The new dog's to be taken in hand too. If the poor fellow would only look brisk and willing, and go about his work as he did before this confounded scheme was set afoot, why, I don't know but what I would say yet to Thesiger, 'He shan't budge an inch after the way you have treated him.' I don't know but what I should just say that slap out. What does Thesiger mean? I declare I cannot tell what to think. It has been a shameful proceeding from beginning to end. Here he has demoralized our servant—filled his head with nonsense—set him up to neglect his duty from considering himself above his place; and then, after my having given in, and behaved, I must say, better than most men would have done in my shoes, then he flies away and leaves us all in the lurch!"

"And takes no notice of either of my letters." For James had written twice, and the second epistle had been more curt and less carefully worded than the first; but even it, with what its author considered its peremptory demands, had failed to elicit a syllable.

At length the gentlemen left the Castle.

"I will see your new master in London, and have an understanding with him immediately," said Lord Galt to his keeper, for Dick had made a pretext to be in waiting at the moment of departure. "You may depend upon it all will be cleared up as soon as I can see Captain Thesiger. If, however"—he paused, and recollected a promise given the evening before—"if, however, the interview is not satisfactory, I should perhaps state that, provided you are willing to remain as you are, I am willing to keep you."

"There is something wrong, I am afraid, Dick," subjoined James; "but never fear, my father will see Captain Thesiger at once, and then I'll write and let you know."

"Thank you, sir," said Dick heartily. The formality of my lord's address had chilled his veins, and he had almost resented an overture so evidently wrung forth by a mere sense of justice—that justice in which Lord Galt had never yet been known to fail—and had looked and felt sullen until James spoke. He did not know what even the few coldly uttered words spoken by his old master had cost him. How often is it thus! How frequently is a gracious act lost sight of through an ungracious manner. The brief assent, the bald acquiescence has been perchance bought at a price little recked of, for dry and thorny barriers hedge in many a fruitful heart, and it remains for a frank word and genial smile to waken the glow of gratitude due to the more solid benefit.

"Thank you, sir," said young Netherby, lifting his head and looking bright again, in answer to the boyish voice; and the news that Captain Thesiger was to be personally attacked was conveyed to his mother at the first opportunity.

"Ah, that's as it should be," observed the widow complacently. "La! 'twill be put to rights in the threading of a needle now. London? Ah, dear me—the times I used to have in London! 'Tis many a year past; but still I do think if I could but get to London nowadays—! However," she would cease to shake her head and wipe her eyes, and would perk up her head again presently — "however, that's neither here nor there, as one may say, and we must be thankful for what we have got. Why now, Dick, you and I may expect to be moving any day, now that my lord is to see Captain Thesiger in London."

CHAPTER XIV.

“HE BUY AN ESTATE!”

“Learn the value of a man’s words and expressions and you know him. Each man has a measure of his own for everything; this he offers you inadvertently in his words.”—LAVATER.

MY lord, however, did not find seeing Captain Thesiger in London by any means so simple an affair as he had anticipated.

“Of course the fellow is there,” he had concluded in his old-fashioned way. “Of course I shall light upon him in a trice now that I am on the ground myself. A dandified creature like Thesiger is never very far away from his comforts in weather like this,” with a shudder. “He is up for this frost at any rate, and we shall catch him before he can look round.”

It would have been fully as easy a mat-

ter to catch the typical weasel asleep on his wall.

If Thesiger were in town, at least no one knew of it. His leave had not expired, and he was still absent from his regiment, but further than that, no information could at first be obtained.

Had any addresses been left? Lots. Could Lord Galt be furnished with these? Oh dear, yes; they were of no use to anybody.

At length he found a brother officer who could mention Thesiger's name without a grin. This young gentleman felt for the obvious ignorance and innocence of the inquirer; and at the very height of his vexation and perplexity withdrew with him into an ante-room, and tendered his services. He knew, he said, Thesiger well—had known him from a boy; and if Lord Galt were a relation—

But Lord Galt disclaimed the idea.

However, here was an opening; he would certainly, he considered, open out his mind to his new friend,—and well it was he

took this straightforward course, as we shall see.

He had hit on the right man. He had by good hap lighted on one who neither befooled him to his face, nor ridiculed him behind his back. And undoubtedly his lordship had laid himself open to ridicule. He had invited to his house—and worse than his house, his moor—a youth of whom he knew nearly nothing, on the mere password of another to whose character he could still less testify; and worse still, he had not only taken the interest in Captain Thesiger which has been shown in these pages, but he had transacted with him various small matters, of which there was no need to make mention to James. Very good reason indeed had he had for desiring his son to jog the tardy memory of their late guest, but he had not told the lad how good it was.

It was this recollection, however, which made Lord Galt's face so long, and his eyes so round, when he observed the sort of sensation his search for Thesiger occasioned at

the barracks. None of those he saw could resist playing a little with him—delicately, for they were gentlemen, but with subtilty, for they loved a joke. The Scotchman's lugubrious face and accents affected them in a manner so peculiar, that they were unable entirely to keep what was stirring within from appearing on their countenances. They were thankful at last when one of their number led him aside.

"Well, thank you—yes, I'll tell you what it is," said Lord Galt. "Thesiger has been buying an estate in the North, you know" (his companion looked gravely at him), "and it happened—the purchase I mean—when he was staying with me in November. When he first came,—for he was over a fortnight with us,—the thing was not concluded, he was merely in treaty with the agent, but he had closed with him before leaving Castle Aird."

"You are sure? You know all about it?"

"Quite sure, he told me everything. He was as open about it all as possible."

"Very open, no doubt. But I mean, did you—ah—did he show you any letters—any papers?"

"I don't remember, indeed. But why do you ask?"

"You are not touchy about Captain Thesiger's honor in any way, Lord Galt? Oh, I don't mean anything bad, but simply—well this is about it. You say he has been buying an estate, but between ourselves I must confess I rather take leave to doubt the fact."

"Indeed?" Lord Galt opened both eyes wide, and stopped short. "Indeed? But how? Why?"

"Because he couldn't," replied his companion, with a smile, broadening as he went on. "Euty Thesiger could no more buy an estate than I could! He buy an estate! He has not money enough to buy a Cochin China cock! Not a shilling in the world beyond his pay, and it all goes"—he broke off abruptly.

Lord Galt stood silent. The revelation was stunning.

"I hope," continued his new friend, after a few minutes' uneasy pulling of his mustache, "I hope you are not *too* much interested in this, eh? Thesiger is such a deuce of a fellow for borrowing—"

"Oh, that is no matter, no matter at all," rejoined Lord Galt hastily, and with the instinct of a gentleman disdaining to mention the paltry "fivers" which he now saw irrevocably lost. "Oh no, I am thankful to say I had nothing to do with Glenfarren."

"Glenfarren? Ah? Oh, now I begin to see my way. Glenfarren is in Scotland, is it?"

"Yes, in Ross-shire."

"To be sure, in Ross-shire. Oh, it is clear as day now. Good gracious!" said the young man, laughing again, "if that is not Thesiger all over! Sir Wilfrid Curtiss of ours has really and truly bought Glenfarren—in fact, he has just concluded to purchase a neighboring moor as well, and has paid a jolly good price for the two. Well, Thesiger has his own little way on

these occasions; he does the honors of the regiment, and takes to himself any small credit it may achieve. Of course the further he is from any of us, the more license he gives himself."

"But I don't understand. What has this to do with Glenfarren?"

"He has been hearing Curtiss talk about Glenfarren, and Sir Wilfrid has been rather big about Glenfarren; and altogether there has been a fuss made about Glenfarren, and Euty does not see why he should not have a Glenfarren too. Now that you have put me in mind of it, he was always on the point of buying some place or other at the time this was going on. He does not mind much what he says, even here, where every one knows him, and he is laughed at right and left,—so I should imagine he would be fairly irrepressible when away from us all. As soon as he found that you knew nothing about Curtiss and Glenfarren, he would buy Glenfarren like a shot."

"What?" said Lord Galt. "What?"

"It's all moonshine, you know. Glen-

farren has been bought sure enough,—but not by Euty Thesiger."

"But—but—but—he has engaged one of my keepers to go to him there."

"Oh, by Jove!"

"He has indeed. Fixed his place and his wages and everything. Thesiger was to have sent word in a few days after leaving us, and the poor fellow has been hanging on and on from day to day and week to week—"

"Oh, but I say, that's past a joke."

"And here have we been wondering what on earth to make of it! We could not get at him anywhere. My son wrote twice, and had no answers to his letters. Most inconvenient it has been for me in every way. Why, I can hardly now believe it. He has talked by the yard of the place, and all about it. Described the moor—"

"Quite his style. He could do that famously."

"But I know the country, and I *know* he was correct;" suddenly Lord Galt felt as if he must have some hold for his feet. "I

assure you," with a touch of asperity, "I am not a person to be imposed upon so easily as that comes to. I should have detected him fast enough. Why, Strathgourlie, my brother-in-law's place, is not far off and I stay there constantly—"

"Did you tell Thesiger so?"

"I did." It was a gauntlet of defiance. Lord Galt shook out the words from between his lips, and confronted his companion boldly.

"Indeed? How, then, had you not heard of the sale of Glenfarren?" was, however, all the answer he received.

"Why, to be sure, it is some years since my last visit, and my brother-in-law never writes—"

"And you are not posted up in affairs in his quarter? Which, probably, you yourself, Lord Galt, let out to Thesiger in the beginning of your acquaintance. As soon as he found you knew nothing of the affair, you were at his mercy. But to decoy your keeper away—that was too bad."

"Too bad, indeed. I should think it was.

'Pon my word, even now the audacity of the whole thing seems almost incredible. I don't see that I am to be blamed for being slow to perceive that a friend, a guest in my house, and a member of this regiment, could act in a manner so unworthy of a gentleman."

Before he left the barracks, however, Lord Galt's indignation had been in some degree appeased. He had been made the object of a great deal of agreeable politeness; he had been introduced to several superior officers, and he had been told in confidence by them that the delinquent Thesiger was "half cracked." It had been allowed on all hands that no one could have behaved more badly, but it had also been broadly hinted that Lord Galt would confer a very great obligation on the regiment if he would not blow abroad the matter.

Oh, it was very bad, very bad indeed! They had no objection to confessing in the most candid manner possible their opinion among themselves,—but to have poor Euty

publicly shown up was another matter. Poor fellow! Really he could not help himself; it was his nature. Lord Galt they were sure, would not be too hard on him. Lord Galt could not be expected to have known the sort of tomfool he was. Any name was permissible for the nonce, provided only that the outrage and dismayed peer would hold his tongue subsequently.

And then Lord Galt had luncheon; and by the time he had eaten his chop, and drunk his glass of sherry, friendly relations had been quite established betwixt him and his entertainers. It ended in this, that ere he left, all intentions of branding Captain Eustace Thesiger as a cheat and a liar wherever his name should be known, had subsided into the mere occasional grumble of his name, as he went along the street afterwards. He had learned to understand that the butt of the regiment was to be borne with.

The first burst of righteous indignation had, however, had one good effect. He had

so tragically detailed the disappointment inflicted, had talked so much and so well of "poor Dick," that the errors and shortcomings of the latter had fallen into the background, and he was able to order James to write a letter to him that should be really kind and commiserating.

"Don't say too much about it," he suggested, with native shrewdness. "Don't make too much of the affair. 'Tis a fool's business, and we have all played fools' parts. And, look ye here, James, don't let Thesiger down more than you can help. In fact, I should just put it this way, that it has been rather a mistake altogether, (which it most certainly has), and that I shall be very glad to keep Dick on with me, (which I shall have to do, whether I am glad or not!)."

With which admonition seasoned by the interlaced reflections, the old gentleman dismissed the affair from his mind, glad to have done with one so unpleasant and unprofitable.

CHAPTER XV.

ALL OVER.

“O, who would trust this world, or prize what’s in it,
That gives and takes, and chops and changes every minute?”
QUARLES.

THUS burst the bubble, as many another has done before it.

We will pass over the scene in Dick Netherby’s cottage when the London letter arrived, since our readers can easily imagine for themselves the first rapturous emotions inspired by the sight of the lordly envelope with which Lord Galt’s young son had armed himself, the opening, the perusal, the dawning sense of something amiss, and finally, the comprehension of the whole bitter truth. Unhappily James was not present to soften with smile or kindly word the shock inflicted by the bald statement of facts which he had felt himself compelled

to make; none of the consolatory expressions which would assuredly have followed had the communication been made by word of mouth, had been attainable by the boy's stiff steel pen; and in short, there was absolutely nothing to mitigate the blow in all its severity.

But it was a pity that this should have appeared so plainly in the reply which was dispatched from the cottage. Marion and her son were not adepts in the art of composition; and sore and smarting as they were, the effusion savored so strongly of temper, discontent, and disgust, that it was no wonder if my lord, on receiving so unseemly a provocative, reddened to his brows, and exclaimed, "Heyday! that settles the question. I'll have no more Netherbys at Castle Aird, let them go where they will!"

Again, however, a sense of justice interfered on Dick's behalf. Had Dick been dismissed his old master's service at this juncture, the young man's prospects for life must inevitably have suffered damage, and

this single consideration ultimately outbalanced a host on the other side. At first, indeed, it was not uppermost. Displeased as he was with his servant, and feeling him an incubus, why should Lord Galt not palm off the hot-headed youth upon a friend,—foist him on to the shoulders of some other man? He knew several who would have been glad to oblige him in such a matter, to whom he could have said as much of the truth as was necessary, and who would at any rate have relieved his shoulders of the burden, if they did not keep it long upon their own. Norreys, or Shuttleworth, for instance. Each of them had scores of keepers, foresters, watchers—it mattered not what he were, so long as Dick was in their pay somehow. “But I doubt he would not be with any one long,” meditated the old gentleman shrewdly. “I doubt he would come down in the world, and it would be on my conscience that I had given him the first bowl over. No, no,” with a sigh; “that must not be. I’ll not have the boy’s blood on my head; he shall

have his chance, come what may of it. But as for this letter," wrath again kindling, "it is as absurd and impertinent a farrago of nonsense as ever was strung together. What to reply to it, I really—really I do not know. He ought to be well put down, and shown how shamefully he is behaving. It is almost insulting, that's what it is. The idea of such a thing? But," softening again, "there are excuses for the lad. He has been grossly deceived and ill-used, and what to say on behalf of Thesiger, I'm sure I cannot tell. 'Pon my word, it would take a cleverer man than I am to say anything. Perhaps, on the whole—perhaps the best plan will be not to take any notice of Dick's letter at all!"

It was a plan so congenial to the mind of its progenitor that Marion and her son looked in vain for further communications on the subject. It had been understood, they felt, that they were to stay where they were, and sadly and silently they staid. Neighbors they avoided as much as possible at this time, for reasons which may be

easily imagined, since there was now no longer a possibility of preserving a long-cherished illusion, and since everybody, far and near, seemed all at once to know as much. Rob M'Clintock told them, perhaps. How the truth had come out to him was a mystery; but on the very evening on which the enemy had met with his downfall, Rob was flapping his wings and crowing a downright good hearty crow over it, while in a few days the tidings had spread all over the country.

"Isna yon an awfu'-like story?" Rob and the gudewife were alone, and there was no restraining the loquacity of the worthy farmer on the all-engrossing topic. "Heerd ye e'er o' siccan a will-o'-the-wisp a' your days? Ye'll mind I tell't ye; I kenned hoo it wad be frae the affset. I was aye threepin' that it was a queer-like han'-ower-heed business. What kenned the Captain o' Dick? What kenned Dick o' the Captain? Baith the twa' o' them were bummin' i' the dark. Dinna ye mind, wife, thon nicht that you an' me had the first obering

(Anglicè, hint) o' what was like to be; dinna ye mind hoo stoonded I was, an' hoo I stood an' glowered at Hector, wha brocht the tale, an' says I, 'Dick Netherby to be a grand gentleman's heed keeper! Dick Netherby!' says I. Ye'll mind hoo I said it. An' ye'll mind—"

But Mrs. M'Clintock would "mind" no more. "Oo ay," she retorted briskly. "Oo ay, we can a' mind gin we wull, what ither folks wad be fain to forget. It's queer hoo, whan the Lord sends affliction, a'body's keen to hae had a han' in it. What for suld ye hae misdooted the Captain? Ye kenned naethin' o' the Captain—"

"I misdooted him a' the same," said Rob, exultingly.

"Misdooted him? Muckle gude that did," cried the dame, swiftly changing her tack. "Misdootin', warks a heap o' wonders, doesna it? Wha'll ye misdoot neist? Mysel', or Meg? It begoud wi' puir Dick—"

"Puir Dick indeed! Puir craven cuif! Puir peahen, wha hasna the gizzard o' ane!

Keep me, when I was his age I wad hae askit naethin' better than a brattle wi' ony fellow wha girded at me as I did at him—"

"An' sae wad ye yet, gudeman."

"Sae wad I yet? What's that she says? Sae wad I yet? Na, na, my day's ower. Gudesakes, wife," but his tone was no longer fierce and loud, "Gudesakes, what are ye thinkin' o'? 'Sae wad I yet?' Aweel, she's no that faur wrang. Like it? I micht like it weel enough; but see ye, I'm an elder o' the kirk, an' my Lord Galt's manager, forbye bein' an auld man, wha suld ken better. Na, na; fechtin's no for the likes o' me, but an' I had been i' Dick Netherby's shoon, troth, I wad hae tell't ye anither story. Deed an' it's true, 'Conscience mak's cowards o' us a', as the Scriptures hae it. Faix, it's true, yon. 'Conscience mak's cowards o' us a', and gin it werena for his ill conscience, I wud believe there's mettle i' the loon yet."

"Aweel, conscience or no conscience, I'm vexed for him," rejoined Mrs. M'Clin-tock, somewhat pacified by the admission.

"Whene'er I think o' Dick, I aye think 'puir Dick.'"

"Think awa as muckle's ye please; 'deed it's as ye said yersel', gin it does little gude, it'll do little ill," said Rob, with a grim delight in thus turning the tables. "'Puir Dick,' quoth she! Puir Dick, certie! He's puir eneugh Dick noo, the rascal! An' wha's to blame? Wha's fau't is't?"

"No' a' thegither his ain, Rob."

"Maist a' thegither his mither's, then. She's bred him, she's fostered him, she's ruined him," he went on, after a long pause, during which he had been sunk in meditation. "The Lord forbid that ane o' His creatures suld cast a stone at anither, an' that ither i' trouble; but if Marion Netherby has to see her ain son leave this world for a warse instead o' a better, she has hersel' to thank for it, an' nane besides."

CHAPTER XVI.

NEW THOUGHTS AND A NEW FRIEND.

“Hope, without action, is a barren undoer.”—FELTHAM.

AFTER the first explosion, no vindictive word was again heard on the subject of Dick Netherby's mirage within the precincts of the Home Farm, and the young man needed not to have shunned them as he did. Perhaps it was natural, but certainly it was a pity that the past could not be forgotten in respect to the M'Clintock's, and that true to himself the new and untried should still have for the restless youth a fascination irresistible. The old life seemed duller than ever now, and his daily duties more unpalatable than before. An object to which he could look forward, as to which conjecture, expectation, and excitement could be indulged, had become a

necessity, and the usual dreamy desire for change and variety now gave way to a resolution to obtain it.

But how, and by what means? He had tried already two short cuts to Fortune, and had made nothing of either, yet his soul loathed the idea of giving up the attempt. Something surely would come his way, if only he were on the look-out, and at length one day a thought occurred, which in his eyes seemed a happy one. He would make friends with young Mr. Andrews, the owner of a new and thriving general shop at the Port. He would walk over and see what came of it.

People said Andrews was wealthy and clever. He was certainly doing a good business, and he drove a smart gig. He might be in want of a partner; who could say? And supposing he were, and supposing he took a fancy to Dick!—in ten minutes the whole thing was arranged and settled at the cottage.

Accordingly upon the very next day—it chanced to be a cold drizzling March after-

noon, but he was too impatient to wait—our young keeper, with fresh hopes all agog within, and looking handsomer and more animated than he had done for many a day, strode across the moors, and under cover of consulting the new resident about some physic for a sick dog, struck up the desired acquaintance.

Andrews proved to be even more responsive than could have been anticipated. With frank admiration he eyed the tall figure whose broad shoulders towered above his head, and he entered into the difficulty and the consultation with a goodwill that was promise enough for anything. More, he proffered his personal attendance—he would come over and visit the kennels, if agreeable.

Of course it was agreeable: could anything have turned out better? He was to come, and come the very next day. “And then,” thought young Netherby, with a throb in his veins, “and then!—”

It seemed as if he had really fallen on his feet at last; and he looked like his old

self again—like what he had been before the schemings and plottings of the foregoing twelve months had bewildered and bemused him—as gaily humming a long-forgotten air, he stepped across the cottage floor, and related the adventures of the afternoon.

But he did not go down to take the ailing pointer his medicine, as afterwards he wished he had, when the time for wishing was past. He considered that the visit could be paid in the morning; and when morning came he went accordingly,—but his spirits met with a sudden check at the kennel gate.

The pointer, Gyp, had died in the night; and mingled with a sharp twinge of shame, there was genuine sorrow in the gaze which the delinquent bestowed upon the poor animal's lifeless remains. His negligence had cost his master the loss of the best dog in his kennels, but it had also cost the keeper a faithful companion and friend; and with a blank feeling of contrition and uneasiness he stood still with the bot-

tle in his hand. He did wish he had not delayed.

But the lad's evil genius—alas! that we should have to use such an expression of a mother—was at hand to ward off the continuance of such emotions. When the affair was explained to Mrs. Netherby she treated it with scorn. A dead dog, forsooth! Dick must have little indeed to trouble him when he could take on in that way about a dead dog. Nasty, tiresome creatures they were at all times; and as for that Gyp, "Why, Dick," with a sudden thought, "listen then, Dick, I have something to say—"

"Bother! Let me alone," growled her son.

"Let you alone? no, not I," retorted Marion, good-humoredly. "I know better than that, my dear. Why, Dick, here have you been whining over a rubbishing beast, and me wishing that all the others was like it—and neither one nor other ever seeing the chance it may be to us both! You write to my lord this very day and

give him the whole account of the creature's illness, and of how you fetched the medicine to him, and the nights you sat up with him—"

"I'm to do that, am I?" broke out Dick with an oath. "Like enough that I should, and like enough he would believe me! Aren't there plenty of folks at the Castle to tell him the truth as soon as he is down again? A nice scrape I should be in then! No, no, none of that. I have killed the poor brute, and there is nothing more or less to be said about it."

"Well, I'm sure—"

But he had turned away, muttering to himself—there were times when he could not bear the sound of his mother's voice.

Andrews, however, was more successful in charming away his new friend's mood. He represented that such accidents would occasionally happen; that dogs must die some time or other; and that it was of no use crying over spilt milk. He then introduced other topics, and all three were soon with these engrossed; for as he had driven

over to the cottage in his dashing conveyance, and had got himself up to the best extent of his powers in order to impress favorably his new acquaintances, Mrs. Netherby was graciously pleased to consider him worth her attention, and to forget, in doing honor to his guest, her difference with her son. Her choicest reminiscences were accordingly produced, her most elegant phrases were recapitulated, and Lady Harriett was hurled at his head before he had well sat down to the table. Mr. Andrews must not for a minute be left to suppose that his hostess, although found in such reduced circumstances, knew of nothing better; and London and London seasons, lords and ladies, powdered footmen and French maids, allowed but little time even for "poor John" and the humbler glories of the Home Farm.

Andrews was completely taken aback, and scarcely realized the ground whereon he trod. Was this the poor widow Netherby, the keeper's old mother, with whom he had felt it a condescension to drink a cup

of tea? Was this genteel dame the parent of the great rough fellow who was indeed in some degree superior to the ordinary peasantry of the district, but whose broad dialect still fell far short of his own tripping accents? He had liked Dick, and he had meant that they should draw together, each appreciating the other,—but Marion fairly awed him. She spoke of Glasgow with nothing short of contempt; of Glasgow—of the great metropolis of the West!

He listened mute, and heard this: “Yes, to be sure, Glasgow is a very nice place, I have no doubt at all, Mr. Andrews—a very nice place—for them it suits. ’Tis not a place that suits everybody. Lady Harriett, for instance, visited nowhere in Glasgow. Her ladyship’s acquaintance was in London, and in the country. -To be sure she once staid a week in Edinburgh on her way North, but Edinburgh was dull, very dull: brown paper in the windows and grass in the streets. ’Twas in the summer time no doubt.—”

"Ah, we have none of that in Glasgow," Andrews could, however, rejoin to this. "In Glasgow, Mrs. Netherby, there is always something stirring—always,—all the year round. You can come there any month you please, and you are sure of finding it as busy as a beehive."

"So I have heard," replied Mrs. Netherby, demurely. "'Tis a busy place,—not a fashionable place. Of course, when a place has no season, so to speak—you understand what a 'season' is, Mr. Andrews?—why to be sure, one time or another can't make much difference."

"Season? I don't know about 'season,'" protested Andrews. "People go and come as they do in most places, I take it; and as for balls, circuses, theaters—we have every kind of thing going on, I assure you. Glasgow can hold her own with any city—Glasgow is not a town, mind you, it's a city—and I'd be glad to know of any city in the world that can beat her."

"Dear me, Mr. Andrews, I'm sure no one is wanting to beat her."

"The Exchange, the Cathedral,—"

"I was only saying—"

"The Docks, the Broomielaw,—"

"Of course, of course; there now, Mr. Andrews, don't suppose I wish to run it down."

"Run it down? No, indeed. You could not run it down, ma'am, if you were to try. Why, there are our preachers alone, our ministers—phoo! There's not a man in Scotland can hold a candle to them!"

"I wasn't much in the way of the clergy when I was with Lady Harriett," observed Marion, meekly. "Her ladyship visited in other circles mostly. We had a bishop once at our house, to be sure, and a very nice civil-spoken gentleman his reverence—his lordship was,—but I don't remember of any others just at present."

"But you must have heard them *preach*?" urged Andrews. "It's not meeting them in the house, but hearing them in the pulpit, that we judge by. What would become of your fine bishop if we had him face to face with a Glasgow congregation? Tell me

that. What would the people say if they had to sit under one of your niffy-naffy Englishers, who can't give ten words of a discourse without having them written down?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I did say, Mr. Andrews," said Marion as gently as before, "that the clergy wasn't in my way."

"Not even in church?" cried Andrews. "Not even in church?"

"Oh, I never went to church," replied the widow.

After this Sandy Andrews was often over at the keeper's lodge, and thought almost more of Marion Netherby than he did of her son. Her cool avowal had fairly conquered him—it never having entered into his head to conceive of such emancipation.

In this fact lay the key to the young tradesman's character; he was not wicked, but he would almost have liked to be so. From youth he had been hedged in by respectability and industry, and the acuteness and smartness with which he transacted business and made money, proved in its

way a safeguard from manifold temptations.

Catch him taking poor idle foolish Dick Netherby as a partner! He knew better than that by a long way.

Yet he liked Dick, as most people did. He found him wondrous pleasant company; he envied his fine air and springing step. Dick, by nature amiable, was more than amiable, fascinating, when he meant to please; and to please so eligible a comrade was for the time the object of his life. What then so natural as that the two should draw together, and that an intimacy which, however strictly Andrews might mean to limit it, should yet seem to Netherby the means to the desired end, should result? The one found it easy and amusing to court the other, while the other was no less ready to be courted. He was safe enough; no blandishments could touch his pocket; and he chuckled in his sleeve when now and then a hint was let fall of what lurked beneath; how the land lay, ere long, he pretty well knew.

But none the less was Sandy Andrews willing to be friends, friends fast and close with Lord Galt's young keeper, provided Dick chose to understand the position and accept it. He liked Dick, as we have said, and by and by it seemed as if he found it difficult to do without him. Young men were scarce at the Port, and the two had few contemporaries; it was almost incredible how often Netherby managed to find his way over the moor now that there was an object for the expedition. If not visible in the front regions of the shop, if not lounging in the doorway or leaning over the counter, he was almost sure to be found four days out of the week snugly ensconced within the little parlor at the back.

He was doing no harm there, he thought. He was merely having a rest after his walk—a rest and a chat, and a drop of something warm—and who, pray, could find fault with that? As soon as it became plain that there was to be no word of a partnership, and that civility and hospi-

tality were all that was to be expected from the young Glasgow shopkeeper, the "drop" of whisky-and-water was taken as a matter of course. At first when it had been proffered, there had been a show of indifference, a protest, and even an occasional denial—for Dick was not by nature a tippler,—but the new disappointment, and the necessity for concealing it, presently made the comfortable tumbler which was to keep up his spirits only too welcome.

"Ay, Dick can take his toddy like another man," Sandy Andrews would say to himself, though it was his own hand which filled the glass. "Dick's no milksop. Faith! I wish my head would stand what his does."

And so matters went on. There was nothing very much amiss, nothing very much more than usual amiss, at any rate. The young man was not vicious nor mischievous, nor inclined to evil ways, had better one's been presented to him; but at this point he stopped. He would make no effort. He could not bring himself to

choose a difficult path, however directly it led to his end, if an easy one lay near. He could not give up Sandy Andrews, because he had fallen into the way of going to his house, and had habituated himself to his company, even though vaguely aware that such a course would be advisable, and must be adopted so soon as the return of his master, or of any of the family to the Castle, should bring their people once more under supervision. That, however, was a part of the future which our hero left in his imagination to take care of itself.

It was hinted to him once that he was often now absent from home, and he had his answer on the tip of his tongue; there was nothing, he said, to keep him at home, no work to be done at that time of year. He would yawn as he spoke, and wearily saunter away, as though the discussion bored him; and the country folks, looking after the big strong lazy fellow, marvelled for what such legs and such arms had been bestowed.

But in the very midst of all this, an event occurred which startled Dick Netherby out of his lethargy with a vengeance—he fell in love.

CHAPTER XVII.

NANCY IRVINE.

“I’ll ne’er blame my partial fancy,—
Naethin’ could resist my Nancy,—
Ance to see her was to love her,—
Love but her, and love forever.”

BURNS.

BUT who was there to fall in love with at Castle Aird? Nobody. And how, then, did Dick achieve the feat? We shall see.

Five-and-twenty years ago the good old coach was still in use all over the unfrequented districts of Scotland, and every morning about eleven o’clock one of these cumbrous vehicles rumbled into the Port, and carried off its cargo of passengers to Girvan, in time for a good jogging and stopping afternoon train. Now it fell out one July evening, about four months after the sudden and vehement intimacy above

recorded had been entered into, that Andrews made a proposal to his very dear friend Dick. "Dick," said he, "Glasgow fair is on this week." Dick looked up; what was Glasgow fair to him? "Glasgow fair is on this week," proceeded Andrews, "and instead of being the busier for it here, we shall be slack. None of the folks will come our way; they go to Rothesay, Dunoon, and all the places up and down the Clyde; so as they don't bother themselves about us, what about going to them? Hey, then, what d'ye say to having a spree ourselves, my lad?" suddenly clapping his companion's shoulder.

It was soon arranged. The young men were to find quarters with the family of Andrews; but, although proposing to be housed and fed there, it was not without sly looks of intelligence that they agreed it would be odd but they would find sufficient entertainment elsewhere to keep them from being a burden on their host. Andrews had never forgotten the slight estimation in which his native city had been held by his

friend's mother, whose experience of life had been gained in a loftier sphere than his own. Ever since he had heard Glasgow described as a busy but not a fashionable place, he had longed to make her eat her words. He had understood, after a sort, that a taunt was implied; and he had yearned to exhibit the grandeur and vastness of his birthplace, with her numberless dignities and resources. But since it was out of the question that Mrs. Netherby herself should be at home in Sauchiehall Street, where Sandy's father and sisters were the plainest of plain good people, he considered that the best plan would be to strike at her through her son. Dick was a choice spirit after his own heart, and the idea of instructing his ignorance and patronizing his simplicity was more than delightful. He had learned, indeed, several things from young Netherby while at the Port; but in Glasgow—on that hallowed ground—he knew whose foot would metaphorically stand upon its native heath.

On the other hand, he would have to show to his former intimates a presentable fellow and creditable acquaintance. My Lord Galt's gamekeeper sounded well. He prophesied that they would both have more invitations than they would know what to do with.

To all of this did Dick seriously incline. To be going somewhere, with some one, was enough. At last he should shake off, for a time at least, Castle Aird, with all its mortifying associations; at last he should behold some other outline than that of the frowning hill-sides; at last he could break away from his own thoughts. Never before had such an offer been made him, and he set off in a tumult of joyous anticipation, huddling together in his mind visions of circuses, music-halls, ministers and mountebanks—all the various boasts and brags of Andrews. How was it, then, that that very night, and the next, and yet the next again, found him racking his brain for excuses to remain in the quiet family circle, or with heavy and reluctant heart

dragged thence by his friend against his will?

It was not for Janet's sake, nor yet for Jemima's. Those excellent young women Sandy's sisters, apprentices at a Berlin-wool shop near at hand, were not outwardly attractive. They had cold red-tipped fingers, and pale faces. Bred in a spinsterly atmosphere, Dick Netherby was too much for them. They did not know what to make of him, nor he of them. They took refuge in the teapot and the bread-knife.

This might have been embarrassing, had any one cared to be embarrassed; but no one did, least of all the visitor himself,—he had neither eyes nor ears at liberty. The former were always straying in one direction, hand and step following the lead directly opportunity offered; and when it came about that he had to sing, and that without a moment's ado, he lifted up his voice, and in accents melodious, lilted out the sweetest love-song ever mortal breathed, there was a smile on everybody's face but

on that of one, and on that one there was a blush.

What was it all about? Why must needs the singer throw such a glow of warmth, such a fervor of significance into the simple strain? He had sung it many a time; had beguiled poor Meg M'Clintock's beating heart from her bosom by the amorous ditty then, oh, so carelessly rendered! but now, now all was different.

"I'll ne'er blame my partial fancy,
Naethin' could resist my Nancy."

So the words ran, and there sat Nancy, lovely Nancy Irvine, grave and sad in her black dress, a newly-made orphan, all abashed, aroused, and trembling at the bold homage thus openly rendered.

Ah, there could be no mistaking for whom and to whom the song was sung.

It had been on Nancy's account that worthy Mr. Andrews, when informed of the young men's unexpected and, as it had seemed to him, inopportune arrival, had

exclaimed in perturbation *extrême*, "Sandy here! Sandy here, and company with him! Bless me, here is a mischance! Hoot-toot, this will never do. On this day of all days in the year! I would nearly as soon they had come on a Fast! Janet—Jemima—what's to be done, lasses? Not a word of it beforehand, not a syllable; all must be brought upon us in a fuss and a bustle; that's Sandy to the life! Ahem—ha—" the entrance of the self-invited guests necessitating an abrupt change of tone. "Well, Sandy, my man, how are you? This is your friend? How are you, sir? This—this is rather sudden, Sandy."

That had been all; but presently the apparent coolness of the welcome had been explained.

"'Twas for Nancy's sake, Sandy; only for Nancy's sake, I tell ye. There's a woman in trouble in the house. She came this morning. The funeral was last week. I was there myself. I went to Mauchline on purpose,—for he was a great friend of my own, was Peter Irvine. Nancy is Peter's

only daughter, and my home is hers till she gets another. Poor thing! So now you'll understand, both of you, and we'll do our best; but you must be quiet, Sandy, my man—douce and quiet, d'ye see? As for your friend—young men can aye amuse themselves. You'll go and you'll come, you'll go and you'll come; and all I mean is, just when you are in the house, keep down your tongues a bit; cheep a wee thing lower when Nancy's by;—and walk gently, gently,—don't go stamping and tramping about.—Oh, here she comes."

In she came at the word, and so sensibly had both the youths been impressed by their host's thoughtful premonitory exhortation that their behavior, instead of deviating from that inculcated, exceeded it in degree; insomuch as stamping and tramping having been prohibited, not one nor other of them stirred a foot, and whereas they had been enjoined to lower their voices neither emitted a sound.

But the demeanor of the two was widely different. Sandy, awkwardly mute,

colored to the roots of his hair and the lobes of his ears, breathed hard, fidgeted with the knuckles of his fingers, fastened his eyes on the floor, and omitted any sort of salutation. Dick, on the other hand, bowed low, and nothing else seemed to be required of him.

Every one present, including probably Nancy herself, felt the contrast, and all that followed seemed but the natural sequence of that moment.

Sandy Andrews was not, however, to be put down without some show of fight on what he considered to be his own domain. He was soon by Nancy Irvine's side, contesting her favor, happily vulgar, innocently pert; and it was not without a valiant resistance that she was permitted to occupy any chair which he had not placed for her.

He was not particularly successful. He could not make much of it. However rudely he might push past his rival, and however resolutely interrupt his address or intercept its reply, he could not draw the

fair one's head his way for long. It was at his suggestion—foolish fellow!—that Dick sang. He thought that there was no reason why the little piano in the corner should not be used, and that with his friend thus safely disposed of, attached perforce to his eldest sister whose accomplishments led that way, he could pleasantly slip into the vacated seat.

But Netherby had never sung to an instrument in his life. He was willing enough to oblige, and assented to the proposition immediately, but he sat where he was, and tunefully struck a note that needed no helping out; nor, when once started, was he permitted long to be silent, for one song led to another, and while all the circle listened mute, softened, motionless, Andrews had only himself to thank for having unlocked a fountain whence flowed for him such distasteful springs. He could not even shorten an evening which was one of enjoyment to every one but himself.

And Dick dreamed and woke, and

dreamed and woke again and again that night, and whether waking or sleeping, the image of Nancy Irvine was ever present with him. The persevering assurances of his friend that the two were not wanted at home, that they had best be off for the day directly breakfast was over, were met by a coldness which needed no interpretation; and when at length such hints could be evaded no longer, the hours were hurried through with one thought only uppermost—"When shall I get back to Nancy?"

That Andrews guessed as much, and that the conviction chafed and fretted him, was equally obvious. He had never, it appeared, been less inclined to hurry; every trivial incident delayed his footsteps, and every roundabout route suggested itself to his memory. Dick must really see this, and must by no means miss that; he must just stroll round this way, and step up that way;—until at last the impatient and uninterested guest, his forbearance exhausted and his feet aching from hot and hard pavements, to which they had never

been habituated, made a stand. He would go no farther, and fare no worse. Other sights and sounds could surely wait; they would not take wings and fly in the night; he was deafened by the din and blinded by the glare; he had no fancy for the music-hall or the theater.

"Your 'partial fancy' takes you another way, I'm thinking?" scoffed Sandy, biting his lip, with a sudden resolve to have it out.

The sneer was met by a smile, the smile was accompanied by a laugh in the eyes and a reddening of the cheek.

Sandy marked it all, his own color rose, and the next words were spoken ere he thought.

"Home to see Nancy Irvine, eh?"

"Home to see Nancy Irvine? Ay."

"You're a bold lad to say so," observed Andrews, after a moment's consideration. "My father won't stand any nonsense under his roof, and—"

"He shan't have any."

"You are in earnest, then?" But he

knew before he spoke that to such a question no response was needed.

None came and that evening was a repetition of the one before.

On the next, however, there was a change in the programme. It had been a lovely summer's day, and instead of spending the balmy hours cooped up within doors, whether at home or abroad,—whether in the little dusky parlor, or in any heated flaring place of public amusement,—it was suggested—by whom it could hardly be said—that all the party should wander forth after supper. Gardens were near at hand, the kind sisters aided and abetted the little love-play which was being carried on beneath their roof, and the indignant brother was powerless. He could not prevent Dick's having his hour of triumph; he had to see him lead away his prize from among them all, and to see that she was willingly led; he had to witness the glow upon her sweet countenance whenever, in the course of their ramble, the two were encountered sauntering in the shadiest paths, and he

had to forecast many a repetition of the same.

More than once in the days that followed he did, indeed, in very desperation, lift up his voice. He knew that it was probably in vain; he felt that he was a fool; but he could not resist the impulse of the moment.

Of course he had the worst of it; Dick laughed in his face. The fortunate young man did not care to dissemble; why should he? All were on his side except his own personal friend, and as for him the lover had but one reply to make to warnings, gibes, or jests,—it was nobody's business but his own.

"Can I help it, man?" he said one day, Sandy having been unusually sarcastic and irritating. "Am I to blame? What's the use of talking?"

"It is provoking; that's all. It was not for this we came here."

"True enough. What of that?"

"Get the better of such sickly rubbish; pluck up spirit, and be a man again."

"I never was more of a man than I am at this moment."

"Be as you were before."

"That's beyond me."

"Come I'll show you the way."

"Let me alone."

After that Sandy saw the case was hopeless. He was not himself in love, had never been, but the shock of astonishment and admiration with which the first glimpse of Nancy Irvine had inspired him had given place to a humiliating sense of envy as he marked his friend's success, and contrasted it with his own failure. This penniless lass had preferred a poor keeper, with literally nothing that he could call his own, to all that he, the prosperous well-to-do Sandy Andrews, could offer. He had taken care that she should know of his own excellent business, and of the numerous comforts and luxuries wherewith he could supply a wife; but the recital had fallen flat. One whisper from swarthy Dick had been sufficient to turn her attention, and try as he might he could not regain it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RECALL.

“What, shall we part without a mutual kiss?
Oh, who could leave so sweet a face as this?”

QUARLES.

IT might have been thought that this being the case, it would have been but poor fun to Sandy to accompany the party on a sober and sensible expedition, which was one day undertaken by them at the instigation of Mr. Andrews, senior. Mr. Andrews thought that there was no reason why Nancy should not see the fine old Cathedral, nor why, if she approved, and if the young men behaved themselves, and did not go talking and laughing, but remembered they were in a church, and not on the deck of a steamboat—if they would recollect that, there was no reason why the whole set of them should not go together.

Nancy professed herself willing, and so did one and all, Sandy included. Where the others went he would go, and whether he enjoyed himself or not, was his own affair.

Off they set, and all went well—well at least for the lovers—until one moment, one unlucky moment. Dick had lingered behind a pillar with Nancy, both of them perchance hoping that the rest of the party might pass on out of sight, and leave them awhile to each other, when a voice, which seemed to him familiar, said in courteous accents, “Be so good as to let this lady pass.”

The young keeper drew back hastily, pleased by a request so opportune, and ready to make the most of the chance it afforded.

“Stop a moment,” he said to Nancy, detaining her also. “We are in the way here. If you will sit down”—and he turned to look for a seat.

He turned, and the next instant confronted his master, Lord Galt.

It so happened that Lord Galt had run down to Glasgow for a public dinner, at which he had conceived it his duty to be present, and he was now, in further pursuance of such duty, escorting the guest on whom he had been in attendance, over the principal places of interest in the city. To find himself all at once shoulder to shoulder with his gamekeeper, and that gamekeeper apparently engaged in the same task, was rather surprising, and the impulse of the moment was to exclaim, "Dick!" and stand still, awaiting explanation.

Accordingly this was precisely what his lordship did.

"Dick!"

"Yes, my lord." The color mounted high on the young man's bronzed cheek; but he stood his ground well on the whole.

"What are you doing here?" It appeared to be of no use to wait for Dick to speak, and time pressed. "What is the meaning of this?" demanded Lord Galt sternly.

"It is Glasgow fair, my lord."

"Glasgow fair! Glasgow fair!" replied Lord Galt. "What in the world—" but he paused for his eye fell on Nancy, and there was something in her young attendant's air and look which made him hesitate. "Glasgow fair!" he murmured dubiously.

"I have run up for a few days, my lord, with a friend. I hope it is no harm?" said poor Dick, with a certain wistful anxiety in his voice. It—the passing tremor—was the best plea he could have had, and happily his master caught it.

"No harm? Well—I don't know. Certainly," began Lord Galt briskly—"certainly you ought to have—" But again his look softened. "Well well, well well"—under his breath ("for," thought the kind-hearted old gentleman, "I won't disgrace the poor young fellow before his sweetheart")—"well, well, we'll say no more about it. But you know, Dick"—lower—"you know it is the very worst time you could have chosen. The 'twelfth' just coming on—"

"I shall be back again at once, my lord," joyfully.

"At once? To-morrow?"

"To-morrow?" said young Netherby, flushing up again, while the dismal tone of his voice said only too plainly how little intention he had had of so literally following up his "at once." "To—to-morrow!" he faltered. "To—to-morrow!"

"Certainly, to-morrow." Lord Galt frowned, for he was conscious of having behaved with magnanimity, and of deserving prompt submission and gratitude. The reluctance and hesitation of his servant he felt to be altogether too bad. "Certainly, to-morrow. You have been here some days, I suppose? Oh dear, yes; to-morrow, if not to-night."

"Very well, my lord."

"Now mind, Dick."

"Yes, my lord."

Then the one speaker followed his noble associates, and the other regained his humbler friends. He tried to take the affair lightly, but could not. To-morrow?

No escape, and no reprieve possible! The songs, the whispers, the evening strolls, were they all to come then to an end with that day? He looked at Nancy, and something like a tear stood in his eye; Fate seemed so cruel.

Too cruel, indeed, to be obeyed. While in Lord Galt's presence and beneath his scrutiny, it was all very well to promise; he would have said anything, done anything to get away, and keep all smooth; but now—go he should not. He scoffed at Sandy, who counseled his setting off within the hour. He argued with Mr. Andrews, who more soberly recommended his leaving early on the following morning. And he caught Nancy on the landing at the top of the stairs.

"Never fear," he said, "Nancy. They may say what they will. I know my own business, and no Castle Aird for me yet awhile."

"But," said Nancy gently, "you promised."

"Promised, did I? Phoo! what of that? A promise is no promise when it is taken

by force, that's always allowed. When I *give* my promise I shall stick to it. Stop, stop a moment; don't go"—detaining her. For a cloud had fallen on the fair brow before him, and young Netherby marked it with surprise, and—what was a new thing with him—submission. He had yielded his heart from the first moment of being brought face to face with the lovely orphan, and he had never sought to regain it; he was ready now to be swayed by her lightest breath. But was he to believe that she could really send him from her? And now—at such a time—when nothing had absolutely been said, and yet when it seemed as though all were understood between them? Impossible.

"I'll make it straight, don't be afraid," said Dick, confidently. "My lord is never the one to be hard on a poor fellow, and it is not likely he will be down at the Castle yet awhile, either,—"

"*That* does not matter. You—you said you would be there."

"I said it, sure enough. What else

could I say? It would never have done to have made a talk, and all I wanted was to get away. Is it fair, Nancy, is it fair to hold a man to a word that's just wrung out of him all in a moment?"

She shook her head: he knew what she meant.

"If you bid me go," said Dick at last, "I suppose I must obey. But it's a hard thing,—I had not thought you would have been so keen to part. Nay, my girl, forgive me, for I don't rightly know what I'm saying. Don't turn away, now. See here, listen to this, and never heed the rest. I will do whatever you wish about the matter; I will, dear,—I will indeed."

Nancy was silent.

"Am I to go?" said Dick, bending over her.

"Yes." Very low, but distinct and clear.

"I am to be sent away from you all at once! and you don't wish me to go, I am sure you don't—"

"Yes, I do."

"Nancy!"

"I do, I do. You have said that you would, and you must not break your word."

"May I come back again?"

No answer.

"May I come back again?"—taking both her hands in his. She did not draw them away, and they were gripped as though in a vise. "One word, Nancy, one word, dear Nancy. May I come back again? And will you then—"

"Oh, you're here!" said a voice close by.
"Please come down; father's waiting."

CHAPTER XIX.

SEPARATED.

"Nay, thou art now so dear, methinks
The farther we are forced apart,
Affection's firm elastic links
But bind thee closer to my heart."
HOOD.

A HA, Widow Netherby, how would your face have looked, I wonder, had you been the one to interrupt that little scene whereof mention has been made in the last chapter; had it been your sharp eyes which had ferreted out the sweethearts in their retreat, and your voice which had broken in upon the significant ominous whisper, which had all but taken the form of that question from which there is no retreat?

You and your teaching, your maxims and axioms, your cautions, injunctions, and

what not are thrown to the winds now Nancy's hands are fast in Dick's, and Nancy's cheeks are wet and her eyes are brimming, and she has shown—which is far better than saying—that he has won the prize he covets.

They did not finish their interview. Neither, I fancy, minded very much about that. They sat silent by each other's side during the short hour which elapsed before bed-time, and it was understood without words that he was to return and complete his wooing. Hope and anticipation rang even in the parting farewell.

"I'll come soon, Nancy, *soon*."

He was not bidden to delay; he was answered by the brightest glance and sweetest smile in the world.

Now at last behold this young idler, this wayward useless boy, possessed by a pure, noble, spirit-stirring emotion. Now see him lifted out of himself, superior to sordid ambition, roused out of slothful inactivity. He will begin to live from this instant, he tells himself. He will labor, he will work,

he will go about on his daily rounds with zest, eagerness, delight. He has Nancy to toil for, Nancy to dream of. He has a home to look forward to and for which to fit himself,—and, moreover, he has to make that home worthy of the woman who is to adorn it.

It is nothing that the hills are lonely now; the hours of solitude are no longer wearisome, nor his days monotonous. He thinks of *her*, the look she bestowed upon him at parting, the tremulous confession of her eyes, the quivering lip, the surrendered hand. Memory provides in all of this a feast he could not, would not share with any comrade. He travels far and wide with his dogs along the roads—they must not roam the moor at this season—and to one and another the friendly word and touch is given, as they cluster round his heels. In the long light evenings he sets to work to cultivate the little garden round the cottage, singing the while snatches of the airs that were Nancy's favorites. A rustic bridge is put up over the stream,

which rises from the little well in front of the plateau. The well is cleared, and planted round with primrose roots. For why? Perchance Nancy will gather their blossoms in the spring.

The while he turns his hand to one and another of these little jobs, he meditates and plans. He does not take his mother into confidence, well knowing what the result of such a step would be, but he turns carefully over in his mind a project. He will make James Galt his friend, and James will be sure to see that somehow or other the marriage can be made to come off.

The return of Lord Galt and his family to the Castle is daily to be looked for, and for once no one has a greater interest in it than Dick Netherby. He has returned home at his master's bidding,—in reality at Nancy's bidding, but who is to know that?—he has returned, and he wishes to show it, and also to make up by present diligence and attention to his duties for past neglect. They all notice the change;

his mother, the M'Clintocks, and one and another about the place take heed that the keeper has all at once taken a new start; that Dick has lost his lazy look and listless air; that he was up betimes on the hill, and brisk as a bee about sundry jobs which are needed at the kennels. He is turning over a new leaf to a certainty, and they think he must have been disgusted with city life, and that he has at last learned by experience that there are worse places in the world than old Castle Aird. Even Marion is gratified by finding him so cheerful—albeit she avers that had it been London instead of Glasgow her son had been visiting, he would not have been so well content to return to the hum-drum neighborhood—but the M'Clintocks and the rest of the people about openly congratulate the young man on his improved looks and tastes.

“There was naethin’ in Glasgow to beat auld Galloway, Dick, I tak’ it.” Rob, the manager, had been so well pleased with the youth’s reappearance and its results that he

spoke quite in the voice Dick had known of old. "A' the gran' sights ye saw there, a' their crinkum-crankums couldna keep ye frae us, eh? To think o' that!"

"I saw but one sight worth the seeing," replied the young man, with a flush on his cheek and a glow in his eyes that would have betrayed him to any one less dull of perception than his auditor. (Honest Rob did not think himself dull, as we know, but it must be confessed that things had been pretty barefaced at the Home Farm before they came under his notice.) He observed nothing now.

"Aweel," he rejoined placidly, "thon's my ain opeenion. Whan I'm awa mysel', there's for me but ae sicht worth the seein', an' that's the road hame again. I'm for nane o' your Glasgows."

So none of them knew, or cared to know, the secret that Dick was burning to tell. He would fain have had a friendly jest on the subject; he would have enjoyed a little inquisitiveness and cross-questioning; he even courted these, but they came not.

To Marion, indeed, no hints were dropped, but with others our young keeper was by no means so reticent, and, indeed, with his heart full of the one subject, an occasional overflow, provided it were only occasional, would have been a relief. But since this was not attainable by accident—and since he hardly cared to make a formal confession—he managed to do without sympathy. His own thoughts were sufficiently pleasant companions. As he went about his daily tasks fancy carried him off beyond the blue range of hills to the north, straight into the little parlor where Nancy sat. He would wonder what she was doing at one hour or another. Was she thinking of him, wearying for him, wondering when he would return? Would they speak of him in the family circle? Would he be missed, wanted? Would the projects that had been in store while he was among them all have been carried out? Who would take his chair at the supper-table, and propose the evening walk?

Questions so tormenting and engrossing

could have indeed no answer but such as conjecture could frame; but since it is of import to our story that we should know what Dick Netherby could not, let us take the chance denied the lover.

It is eight o'clock in the evening, and the sun is gently sinking westward in a golden haze, lighting up every spire and roof in the city, and streaming into the little faded dusky room in Sauchiehall Street, which, with its four straight walls, shabby furniture, and viewless windows, had been of late transformed for two young hearts into a Paradise.

Somewhat drearily the party now assemble there. True there is a show of cheerfulness; Janet and Jemima do their best to prattle; and Sandy takes possession, in so far as he can, of their guest—but it is dull work. He had begun in time, he had sped homewards from the station directly the train had borne Dick out of sight; but he had, so far, made no way. Chattering, pestering, ogling as occasion offered, he had tried his utmost to follow the track

taken by his resolute and successful rival, and he was but barely tolerated. However, he would not despair.

"Look here," he said, "girls; here is a play for us all. I'll stand tickets for the Christy Minstrels to-morrow night, and we can go out now and get them."

He had addressed them all, but he was looking at one only, and Nancy's answering look of scorn and indignation he never forgot nor forgave. She meant it to be merely one of reproach, poor girl; she felt that her recent sorrow and loss was being underrated by such a proposal, and would fain have hidden even from herself any mingling of another feeling; but the truth flashed out of her eyes, without her knowing. *They* said plainly, "Who would care to go anywhere with only you?" and so young Andrews understood them. It was what no temper could stand.

"You won't go?" he replied slowly. "Oh! Well, I am sure, Miss Nancy," biting his lip, "I meant no harm; I could not tell that you would take it so. 'Tis a

pity Netherby is not here, but it is not my fault; I did not send him away, though you look as if you thought I did. I am sure I would bring him back if I could—anything to please; but since I can't, it is hardly fair to visit it upon me; come now, is it?"

He was vouchsafed no reply.

"Well, then, you see that? Now take my advice, miss, and remember the good old saying, 'There's as good fish in the sea as ever were caught.' Netherby's gone, and you have seen the last of him. Pluck up heart," jeeringly, "and look elsewhere."

"Look elsewhere!" repeated Nancy with a start.

"Ay, look about you."

"Look elsewhere! I understand, Mr. Andrews. I see what you mean now. 'Look elsewhere' means that you are tired of me, and would prefer my room to my company. I understand you, sir, and—"

"Oh, I say, do you though?"

"Very well indeed," said the girl, with spirit. "You have been very plain all

through. I am to 'look elsewhere' for a welcome and a lodging, *and I will.*"

She had raised her voice unconsciously, and the last words fell full on the ear of an auditor for whom they had not been intended.

CHAPTER XX.

WOULD NANCY BE A FOOL?

"Love is indestructible,"

CURSE OF KEHAMA.

"**W**HAT'S that, what's that?" exclaimed old Mr. Andrews, who had entered unperceived in the heat of the altercation, and who now stood still in the middle of the floor, aghast no less at the tenor of the sentence than at the tone and attitude of the speaker. "Sandy—Nancy—girls! what's the meaning of this?"

"Nothing, sir, nothing," replied Sandy impudently. "Nancy and I were having our bit of chaff, that was all. Eh, Nancy, wasn't it so?" winking to her to hold her tongue.

"What was he saying to you, Nancy, my dear?" inquired the kind-hearted little grocer, not altogether convinced by his

son's assertion. "He has been teasing you, I doubt. Ay, that's it, I can tell by your face. Never do you mind him, though, my lassie. What! Look elsewhere for a welcome and a lodging? Hoots, fye; when Dick comes again—"

"When Dick comes again!" repeated Sandy, turning a look of pretended astonishment on the speaker. "When Dick comes again, did you say? Oh, you're joking, I presume! There's no word of Dick's coming again, I can tell you."

"Is there not, then?" said Mr. Andrews, much diverted. "Is there not, Nancy? Eh? What? Well? Oh, I'm not to let on, I suppose! There's Janet as douce as a kirk-clock, and Jemima too. Trust the womenfolks for keeping a secret."

"A secret!" His son again repeated the words, looking from one to the other as he did so. "A secret! Well, this is rather queer to my mind. I have heard of no secret; and what's more, I doubt if Dick has. What the— What d'ye mean by all this, I'd like to know? Speak out,

can't you, some of you. There's no sense in riddles."

"There may not be sense, but whiles there's very good nonsense," responded old Mr. Andrews, enjoying the scene, and not disposed to cut it short. "That's as folks think. I'm fond of a riddle myself; but I'm thinking you must be a wee thing dull, stupid-like, Sandy, my man, if this riddle takes you long to unreel."

"Come, Sandy," whispered Janet, taking note that things were more serious than her father saw. "Come, now, are you not thinking of going out?"

"It's too fine a night to stop in the house," added Jemima.

"Is it, though? None of you seemed to think so a few minutes ago," rejoined the young man, now thoroughly out of humor. "None of you said a word of it's being a fine night then. Stop that, I say; what are you pinching me for?" as a light finger was laid on his arm. "You are all in league, I see. Let me alone, you girls, I want to speak to father—not to any of

you. Will you tell me, father," returning doggedly to his point, "will you tell me what you meant by, 'When Dick comes back again?' Who said he was ever coming back? One thing I know, he may wait a bonnie while if he waits till I ask him."

"Like enough, Sandy, *if* he waits. The query is, *will* he wait? I'm no prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but if I was called upon to express an opinion on the subject, I don't imagine it would take me very long to make it, and it would be—eh, Nancy?—what would it be, Nancy?"

Titters from the sisterly pair, and a deeper dye on the brow of their guest.

"There's for you now," continued the speaker, nodding his head delightedly. "You brought him here once, Sandy, and he'll doubtless consider that he can bring himself another time. That's what we think—Nancy and me," patting the shoulder next him. "Hoots, we are all among friends, my girl. Take no offense—none's meant."

"Stop a bit, though." It was not until now that Sandy could interpose, but he took the opportunity which the general laugh occasioned. "Stop a bit," he said; "you are in a mighty hurry with your conclusions, but there are others besides you who have eyes in their heads. You are joking Miss Nancy here about my friend, and as he is my friend," with emphasis, "I'm bound to speak the truth about him. None of you," looking round scornfully, "none of you had ever heard Dick Netherby's name until I brought him to the house. You think yourselves mighty clever, and you think I'm mighty stupid; but for all that, I'm the only one here present who can tell any single thing about Master Dick, the Castle Aird keeper, except just as he has appeared in this house during a week's visit. What's that? Eh?" pressing his advantage as he marked the vague creeping uneasiness which stole over the looks of each, as they stealthily sought to see what each other thought. "D'ye take me now?" pursued the youth. "Who would not

behave nicely when out on a holiday, and in the presence of ladies? Who's going to show their peccadillos then? It's not very pleasant for me—and I'd have held my tongue if others had held theirs—but since you've driven me to it you may hear the truth. If Dick Netherby has been fooling you, Nancy, don't be fooled. He can't marry. He has no money; and he—drinks."

There was a general subdued exclamation, and Nancy rose and left the room.

"There, now she's gone, I can speak freer," continued Sandy, hiding his chagrin under a pretense of relief. "She won't hearken to a breath against him, I suppose. So be it. I have done my part, and mayhap she may be more reasonable by and by. Tell her this, some of you—tell it her in a quiet moment, when she'll take it in—that Netherby's not the man for her. He's not a bad chap, so far as he goes, but it is a fact that he just loafs away his time from one week to another, and drinks all he can

get to pass away the time." Which was sadly true, as the reader knows.

"But, bless my soul!" cried little Mr. Andrews, in consternation. "What—what—what time of day is this to come with such-a-like tale? Here's a young man been in our house for six or seven days, sitting at our table, sleeping beneath our roof—come as your friend, Sandy—and made free to walk and talk by the hour together with your sisters and—and Nancy, and not a whisht of anything amiss! Then, all in a glisk of time, we are to hear that he is—is— No; I'll not believe it—I'll not believe it. I should have been told before; I'll not believe it now. Talk—talk—talk—" stuttered the good man with honest heat, "talk of shutting the stable-door when the steed is stolen! The steed is a thousand miles from the stable by this time, I trow."

"More fool she," muttered his son, frowning; "and more fools every one of you. I know who I think to blame. Why, it appears that you all suspected what the fellow was after, and allowed it to go on and on—

and never so much as said a word to me. Of course I would have to put a stop to it at once. I could have put a spoke in Dick's wheel fast enough, if any one had had the sense to give me a hint. How was I to know? It was no business of mine. It wasn't likely that I was to be prying and watching about the doors here, when I had come up for a jolly good time, and to enjoy myself with my friends. I could not be bothering my head about Dick Netherby and his nonsense. I had other things to think about. Now you see what you've done!"

He had turned the tables successfully; each one who listened felt more guilty and wretched than the other.

"It's beyond me," murmured the old father at last. "It's altogether beyond me. A fine strapper like you! A well-behaved, civil-spoken, quiet, pleasant young fellow! I liked Dick Netherby; I liked his ways. I thought he would have made a good husband and a kind one; but if he drinks! Oh," with a groan, "say no more, Sandy;

say no more. No drunkard shall ever enter these doors to take away one of my children, or one who's as good as mine."

"Drunkard! I did not say Dick was a drunkard—"

"God forbid!—"

"I only said he was inclined that way. You should not take a word up like that. I never meant it to be thought further than that a glass here and a glass there—fuddling away in the daytime, and going to bed half-seas-over at night, isn't the way to get on in the world. A man has no business to take a wife unless he can keep her decently—"

"A man has no business to take a wife," interrupted his father, with a sternness and authority he had seldom if ever manifested before; "a man has no business to take a wife unless he fears God and intends to do his duty in that station of life in which it has pleased God to place him. Ay, you may look," for his daughters as well as his son had raised their eyes, "you may look; you are not accustomed to hear me speak

like this? That's true; I ought to make my mind clear on such subjects oftener far than I do. I am weak and backward—a poor waverer, like yourselves; and the world's strong, and Satan is busy with us all. You know that I work hard, and that I'm fond of my siller—for whilk the Lord pardon me. You know that I have aye thought too much of this life and its cares, its thorns and briars that do but choke up the good seed of the Word. You know all that. But you do not know the grief of heart, the pangs and the wrestlings, the prayers and the tears; my bairns, you know nothing of these. I have been a sober man, and done my neighbor no harm, so far as I know. I have done my duty by you all, insomuch as a poor sinful human being can do it; but what is that at the best? The heart is evil—evil to the core; and there is but One,” looking reverently upwards, “but One who knows, and One who can make clean and pardon, for ‘the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.’”

The two girls rose and silently took their father's outstretched hands.

"My lasses," he said, as they stood by his side, "my dear children, mind what I am saying to you now. Let no man beguile you with a show of respectability and decent behavior. Wait and watch before you plight your troth to any one who seeks it. Don't look at trifles; don't mind a bit of temper; don't expect a man to be always smirking and smiling,—but see what's beneath the surface. Stick to *character*, and to character founded on *religious principle* and *Gospel truth*. That's the thing, my dears—the one thing needful. Never be ashamed to own you think it so. Maybe I haven't ever said a word of this to any of you before; if not, I ought to have said it, and I ask you to forgive me for being so neglectful; but if I never have, and if I never should again—for who knows what a day may bring forth, and what time may be given to us to fulfill our best intentions?—if not, take this to your hearts, for it's true as Heaven above us, there is no surety,

no safeguard for any child of man, unless the Holy Spirit of God is at work within his breast—unless he has learned to know his own utter weakness and insufficiency, and to throw the burden of his sin upon the Lamb that was slain; unless he has cast his anchor upon the Rock—the unchangeable, everlasting Rock of Ages.”

The solemnity of the scene brought moisture to the eyes of all, with the exception of young Andrews, who, awkwardly shifting from one foot to the other, sat internally wondering what had induced so extraordinary an outburst on the part of his usually easy-going parent. After the prolonged pause which seemed due to so affecting an appeal, he was about to rise, when, anticipating his intention of slipping away in order to avoid more, his father accosted him in lighter accents.

“Sandy thinks we are wandering from the point,” he said. “And maybe, Sandy, my man, you are saying to yourself that for one who has thus expressed himself I have shown no great consistency in admit-

ting young Netherby to Nancy's friendship upon your password. I admit it, sir; I admit it. I was hasty, and am like to rue my haste; and she's like to rue it too, which is worse. But there was something about Dick—there was that about the lad that took us all by storm. He seemed so cheery, so steady, so wise-like, and so set upon her, that it was just a treat to see the two of them. Troth, and it did my heart good to see the care-not-for-nobody style in which the callant made love. It seemed a Providence for Nancy, too, poor thing! I was proud to think of her doing so well; and I'll not deny that I was well enough content it should all have come about beneath my roof. I was bewitched, I think. Aweel," with a sigh, "it's over now, over now. You say he drinks—"

"Drinks—drinks—I said he took his glass. Surely a man may take his glass, and take it pretty regular too, without it being all over the country that he drinks."

"'Drinks' was your word for all that,

Sandy. However, we'll not differ in the main. He takes his glass, then. Say he takes his glass now—now when he's young, strong, hearty, needs nothing, wants nothing; what will he do when he is old, decrepit, weak? He takes his glass, you say, for want of something else to do. Has he no work to do? Has he no home to go to? Has he not a good situation, a kind master, excellent wages, a parent, relations, friends? A glass—what has the likes of him to do with a glass?"

"Well, well, I am sure I don't know. I wish," said Sandy, uneasily, "that I had said nothing about it. 'Pon my word, it's a nuisance to be taken up like that; Dick is no worse than others. If it had not been for Nancy Irvine, I'd have held my tongue. You had no call to make complaint of him in *this* house, at any rate," offended into a passing loyalty to his absent friend.

"No, indeed, none whatever."

"Well, just let that girl up-stairs know, that's all. That's the whole that need be said about it."

“Let Nancy know! You have let her know yourself in plenty. What else did she leave the room for? Eh, poor thing!”

“What I mean is, you keep her up to it. I’ll tell Master Dick he need not bother his head to think of her, and the whole thing will die out of itself, if only Nancy will not be a fool.”

But would Nancy be a fool?

CHAPTER XXI.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

"Fortune makes quick dispatch, and in a day
May strip you bare as beggary itself."

CUMBERLAND.

IT was somewhat awkward for young Andrews, already half afraid of what he had done, even while devoutly hoping that the mischief he had made would work its full results—it was somewhat awkward, we say, to be confronted on the very first moment of his return to the Port by Dick Netherby's bold handsome face, beaming all over with welcome. That the welcome was not altogether nor entirely for his friend personally made matters no better. He felt instinctively who had the largest share in those affectionate inquiries, for whose sake was that foolish, wistful, timid hesitation, and he could almost have shaken from his hand the brawny fingers which gripped it so

closely, and whose language was, "So I would hold Nancy if I could."

How had Dick known he would be there? He had told no one he was coming, for indeed until the night before he had himself not known; and yet, apparently awaiting his arrival, as the coach drew up, stood the very man whom of all others he wished to avoid. Sandy, you see, could not tell that it would have been all the same whatever day he had selected; that as soon as it began to be probable his friend might reappear, Dick nightly met the coach, and his efforts were rewarded on the proverbially lucky third occasion of his crossing the moor.

Eager, if general, interest was now manifested in all that Andrews had left behind, and he found it vain to try to escape. As much as he could he parried, however. "Well?" Oh yes, everybody was well. "And going about as usual?" Of course, going about as usual. "Had they sent any messages?" Oh, as to that, nobody ever gave messages nowadays.

"Sometimes they send them though, Sandy."

"Sure enough; but I can't call to mind anything special, upon my word. I came away in a hurry."

"That was it, was it? But," pursued the inquirer, unwilling to feel disappointed, "there are a heap of things I want to know about. Has Miss Janet found her brooch yet? And your father his spectacles? I remembered as soon as I had started that they were in a bowl on the mantelpiece."

"Oh, well, never mind that. I'm tired and hungry. I suppose you will come in and have something," not over graciously. "Come along then."

"What was Nancy about?" demanded Dick at last, and the red in his cheek showed what the effort cost him.

"Nancy? Oh, she's all right. Now don't bother, like a good fellow, till I have had my supper. Come along in. Hey, Peggy," summoning his old serving woman, "here I am, you see, and here is Mr. Netherby. Get us something to eat

as fast as you can—never mind what—for we are hungry and not particular.”

Without giving time for further importunities, Andrews then proceeded to bustle about, open letters, interrogate his factotum, and run his eye over the ledger. After which he carried his portmanteau up-stairs, and was heard moving about overhead.

Dick sat still. He was not as a rule slow of comprehension, but on the present occasion he scarcely knew what to make of the reception he had met with. It was not the air of friendly warning which Andrews had assumed when in Glasgow that now characterized him; from the moment of their meeting he had looked flurried and agitated; his manner, the very hand he had held out at meeting, had been constrained, not to say evasive; and above all, he had seemed unwilling to meet Dick's eye. He should do it, however, and should have to speak of Nancy, whether he would or not, and accordingly the young man had barely reappeared ere she was named.

Andrews took no notice.

"Bless you, man, have you not a word of her—or from her—or—or anything?" cried the lover, losing patience at last. "You know well enough how matters stand between us: I made no secret of my mind to you or to any of them. If it had not been for my being hurried away, and that it was scarce decent to be courting a girl within ten days of her father's being laid in his grave, I'd have had her promise by this time. Surely she did not let you go without some kind word,"—he stopped abruptly.

"I think," rejoined his friend slowly and coldly, "I think you are crazed, Dick Netherby. What is all this about? Did I not warn you from the first that you were wasting your time, and ruining your holiday for nothing? Did I not do all I could to get you away from the house? I was ready to have taken you here, there and everywhere—but you would not be taken. I was at you about it all along—"

"Oh, you were, you were sure enough." Dick laughed and nodded, with saucy deri-

sion and triumph in his eyes—all at once his spirits returning with the recollection—“right you are there, friend Sandy. You have nothing to reproach yourself with on that score. You were ‘at me,’ as you say, day and night, as myself can testify. What of that? You did your part. Nobody can say you did not try your best to spoil sport—only, you see, the sport would not be spoiled. That was how the land lay,” nodding again merrily. “So ‘twas no fault of yours, my man, and now you may tell me all you have to tell with a clear conscience.”

“All I have to tell!—”

“Ay, all. Come now, don’t be afraid—out with it. What says bonnie Nancy, and how does she take my being away from her all this time?”

The gay confident tone, the animated look by which it was accompanied was too much. Whatever of compunction for the treacherous part he had played lingered in Sandy Andrews’ heart was stamped out on the spot, and in its place the smouldering fires of jealous wrath, which had also a

place there, leaped into a flame. Was ever a man and a rival, he thought, baited like this? He did not wish to speak hastily—he was especially anxious not in any way to commit himself, but he could hardly control either his countenance or his tongue. With trembling lip and changing color he accordingly stood before his companion, now resolving to let loose all the bitter things which suggested themselves on the spur of the moment, now hearkening to the counsels of prudence, which bade him beware the folly of such a course—until Dick, who, half amazed and half contemptuous, was a witness of it all, could stand the silence no longer.

“It’s too bad of me, I know,” he said at last, laying a good-humored hand on Sandy’s shoulder. “Of course I see how the land lies, old chap, and I have no business to press you like this on a sore point—”

“A sore point!” cried Sandy, scarlet now compared with what he had been before. “A sore point, indeed! Pray, what may you mean by a ‘sore point,’ sir, give me

leave to ask?" shaking off the hand that touched him.

"Oh well, if it's not one," retorted Dick smiling, "you are behaving rather queerly to me, I think. Why do you look this way and that, and refuse to answer a plain question? And what do you mean by your 'warning' me, too? What should I be 'warned' about? I know I am a poor man, and you are a rich one, and I know Nancy would do a long way better for herself, in the eyes of the world, if she married you instead of me. But then, you see, she does not think so, and so there's no more to be said. If you won't allow that it is anything to you—"

"Of course I won't."

"Why then, speak up like a man, and tell me about the girl."

Still Andrews was silent.

"Well?" said Dick, "well?" His own passions too were rising under such provocation. For the past week he had been living, it must be remembered, on nervous excitement; hopes, fears, tender recollec-

tions, and anxious cogitations, alternating within his bosom; and just at this moment so eagerly looked forward to, and from which so much had been hoped, a check of any kind was hardly to be borne.

Mentally he cursed Andrews' petty spite and jealousy which interfered to prevent his enjoyment and to damp his ardor, but he had no anxiety as to what that ominous hesitation and reserve might mean further.

"I say, get on, can't you?" he exclaimed, impatiently. "You have had your will so far, and tantalized me to the full. It has gone on long enough, this. Speak your mind, if you wish to say anything disagreeable,—I'd rather have that than nothing."

"I don't *wish* to say it," replied Andrews; and indeed he spoke the truth, but circumstances were too strong for him. "I don't *wish* to seem unfriendly, Dick Netherby, but if you won't let me alone, you must just hear the whole. As to Nancy, you would not take a telling, so I let you go on—"

"*You* let me go on!" cried Dick with

a laugh of contempt. "*You* let me go on! Very much obliged to you I am sure for the kind permission,—but I doubt if it was ever asked."

"Stop a bit. You met Nancy at my father's house, and let me tell you that if my father had had the slightest notion of anything more between you than a passing amusement—"

"Passing amusement! The devil!"

"Look here, Dick," said Sandy, with a sudden change of tone; "how do you suppose that word would have sounded in the ears of Nancy Irvine? Do you know who she is—the daughter of 'Pious Peter,' the godliest man in Dumbarton? Do you imagine we would sanction a match between you and one of Peter's family? You should have heard my father last night. Faith, you would have had your eyes opened and your understanding too, if you had heard the good man lay it off from his arm-chair. It was as good a sermon he gave us as if he had been born to the pulpit. And what was it about? You

and the likes of you. You don't get a girl out of his house for your wife, young man, I can tell you."

It was a crushing and most unexpected blow, for Dick had fancied—and justly—that he was a favorite with all the party.

"Was Nancy there?" was, however, all he said.

"In the room? No, I don't think she was," replied Andrews, after a short hesitation, during which he debated whether truth or falsehood might serve his turn best. "I don't think she was."

"She had no hand in it?"

"No hand in the discourse? Of course not."

"You are sure of that?"

"Of course—of course. What then?"

"Then"—Dick drew a long breath and looked at his companion steadily—"then you and your father may just understand this, for once and altogether. I don't listen to discourses of that sort except they're from the lips of the woman I love. Your

father, Sandy, is a very worthy man, he was very kind to me, I thought he liked me,—but that is neither here nor there. Nancy is old enough to judge for herself, and I can manage my own affairs. Why, man,” with a nervous effort to turn earnest into jest, “why, man, what a fright you gave me!”

“’Tis a pity you won’t take a fright then,” rejoined Andrews, drily. “Some folks have skins like leather, and you may cut them over and over again, and they’ll be none the worse. Cannot you understand that this must go no further, you—” pulling up ere the word “fool” escaped him, for something in the face opposite made him beware.

“*No!*” shouted Dick, jumping to his feet, and banging his fist down upon the table till the glasses on it rang again. “No—no, sir. There’s your answer. I’ll not understand—I don’t choose to understand anything of the kind. I am not to be dictated to on this subject by you or any of your family. I’ll go on my own way

in spite of you all; and you will be good enough in the future to mind your own business, Mr. Sandy Andrew, and to let mine alone."

"Let yours alone? Very well," rejoined Sandy, a shade paler than usual. "Very well; I have no temptation to meddle, I can assure you. 'Tis a bad one at the best, and not at all what I care to have a hand in. You'll go your own way, you say? Go, then; go to Nancy, and see what she'll say to you. What—what's this for;" for Dick had risen at the word, and was moving towards the door.

"I am going," he said.

"Going—where?"

"To Nancy."

"One would think he was starting on the instant!" exclaimed Andrews, disconcerted but incredulous; while Cunning whispered, "If he goes now he conquers." "One would imagine he was already upon the road! Don't be a blockhead, Dick. We have both of us been warm and talked nonsense. Cool down, man, cool down;

get back into your chair again and think it over."

Dick shook him aside angrily.

"I have nothing to think over," he said. "You may have been deceiving me—but you may not. At any rate, I am off to make sure." And he opened the outer door with the words.

"But you can't be off till to-morrow morning. There is no coach."

"I am not going by coach. Let go," as Sandy following caught his sleeve. "Let go, I say," said Dick, furiously. "Let go, or—"

Sandy let go. He continued, however, loudly to expostulate. "If you really mean what you say, you know, take a friendly word before it is too late. You can't do yourself a greater damage with a girl like Nancy than by making such a piece of work, and rushing off upon this fool's errand."

"Ha, ha!" cried Dick, "Ha, ha, ha!"

"*She* won't laugh, I can tell you."

"Ha, ha! Won't she then? Ha, ha, ha!"

Good-bye, Sandy. I'm for Glasgow, and the bonnie lassie yonder." Then suddenly lifting up his voice, he sang:—

"Oh, wot ye wha's in yon toun,
The e'enin' sun is shinin' on?
The fairest maid's in yon toun,
His setting beams e'er shone upon!"

Ere the verse was ended, the strong sweet notes faded away in the distance, so rapid was the singer's pace, and young Andrews, hot and foolish, defeated and enraged, could only watch the retreating figure with his eyes, uncertain what to think, and unwilling to think anything distasteful to himself.

"What is he up to, I wonder?" he muttered. "He has not taken the road to Castle Aird. Can it be possible he can mean to go to Glasgow on his feet? Pooh, he's dreaming—dreaming, or drunk. Let me see, had he had anything? Not here. But that's not to say he may not have had his drop before I came. He walks straight enough. There he goes,—but he'll

not go far. He would never go through with anything. A pig-headed brute that I'm well quit of. If he does take his way to Nancy he'll find a hotter reception awaiting him than he has bargained for:—but he'll never go—no, he'll never go. 'The fairest maid's in yon toun,' indeed! 'Fairest maid!' Not a bit of her! I have seen dozens of girls that Nancy Irvine could not hold a candle to. A poor pale-faced thing, with a vixen of a temper. I wish Dick Netherby joy of her—that's to say if they ever make it out,—but I'll take my oath they never do. He go to Glasgow! He'll be here again in his old place to-morrow afternoon; and then we'll have to make it up together, I suppose; and maybe in time he'll be cured of his fancy, and we'll jog along as we did before."

With which conclusion the young tradesman returned to the parlor and his hitherto neglected supper.

CHAPTER XXII.

OVER HILL AND DALE.

“Love will find out the way.”—*Old Ballad.*

SANDY ANDREWS had his supper and went to bed, and meantime his former friend and associate was swiftly threading the high-road to the north with a purpose definite and clear.

He knew what he meant to do. It had been the resolution of an instant, but none the less was it the result of all that had gone before; and could fair Nancy Irvine have now beheld her lover trudging over hill and dale, wending his way through silent woodlands, straggling villages, and lonely mosses, leaving behind mile after mile as daylight departed, and in the clear pale sky overhead the stars crept twinkling into sight—could she have seen him thus

patiently and stubbornly pursuing his way all through the night, and halting not as the gray dawn broke, but only thinking of drawing nearer and nearer to her, she would have been more than mortal if she had not owned a thrill of pride in being so sought and sued for.

He had started upon impulse, it is true, without pausing to calculate the wisdom or folly of the step, but the more he thought of it the better he was pleased with himself.

Mischief, he felt convinced, was brewing, and he ought to be on the spot to counter-act it; to have delayed might have proved fatal; even the loss of a day might have undone him. Something—he could hardly have told what—in Sandy's eye and smile made his late companion scowl as he recalled it. He had never before mistrusted Sandy. Indeed, Dick was singularly simple in this respect; Marion had never been able to teach him suspicion; but a stronger master than the Widow Netherby read him his lesson now. Love sharpens every sense, and brightens the dullest wits. Dick was

not a dullard, and he was alive all at once to much that would have escaped another. He put two and two together with marvelous rapidity as he hastened along, and his courage rose as he felt himself upon the road, and knew by the light that he was in excellent time for the early train from Girvan to Glasgow. But he had not bargained for having too much instead of too little of that valuable commodity on his hands, and on finding himself safely arrived within the precincts of the slumbering town, apparently the only thing stirring within it, he was ready to wish he had not put his best foot forward so persistently; he might have allowed himself a little more law.

Now he had nothing to do but to cool his heels till it should please the good people of the town to wake up and uncloset their shutters; and considering that he was hungry, impatient, and inclined to feel the air of daybreak somewhat chilly, it is no wonder that the hours dragged.

It had been easy to feed his imagination

with visions of his love, of the surprise he should give her, and of the welcome she would accord him, while stepping along beside the rocky shore and beneath the starry heavens. He had not felt cheerless and lonely as the voice of ocean beating up its hidden caves fell upon his ear, nor any special anxiety and distress as he strode away faster and faster from the enemy who had tried to sow discord between him and his—strode *from* him and *to* her; but sitting still a little way out of the town, inactive, wearying to be up and away again, yet with no end to be gained by such a course, Dick's heart gradually sank.

The day seemed as though it would never come. Never in his life had he thought to be so glad to hear a voice and step again as he was now when these saluted his ear, and a drowsy fisherman, knotting a muffler round his throat with one hand, and bearing a couple of oars in the other, emerged from a cottage close by and walked towards a boat which was

drawn up on the shore at no great distance.

"Good day," said the traveler, rising with alacrity from the low wall of a bridge, which had afforded him a seat. "Good day. Are they about yet in the town, think you?"

They were, or would be directly, the man thought, and accordingly our hero turned his steps thither, and in a short time was seated at breakfast. Breakfast did him good; he was another man, he said. He would not now wait for the train, which he learned did not start for another couple of hours, but would walk on ahead and catch it at the first station.

The sun was just beginning to put forth his power, and a glorious summer morning made the whole landscape beautiful. The croak of the landrail sounded ceaselessly from fine fields of corn and wheat, and a pleasant twitter of small birds whispered through the woods. Dick himself began to whistle. He was heartily enjoying his second walk, almost forgetful by this time

of the disturbing cause which had made it necessary, and, we are bound to allow, tolerably regardless of any uneasiness or inconvenience his absence might occasion. He was young and enamored. What more can we say? But he had no idea that he had slackened his pace. Recollecting how much before the necessary time he had reached Girvan, he had resolved to take the second stage of his journey more easily, and the result was what might have been expected of a man with no watch: the train flew by—he was just five minutes too late.

For some time our luckless wayfarer stood still to realize the full extent of his loss, and to consider what should next be done; but after the first outbreak of vexation and regret, dismay again gave place to hope, and with the comforting reflection that a few hours' difference could not really signify, and that Andrews, at least, need never know of his stupidity, he made up his mind, as best he might, to wait for the afternoon express. At a farmhouse near,

some bread and cheese and a tumbler of sweet milk were to be had; and refreshed anew, after a good rest and a pipe, our pedestrian ventured cautiously on another half-dozen miles or so,—walking was nothing to him.

All was right. He was in admirable time (he had to wait an hour or two), and with cheerful contentment he saw the first puff of smoke among the trees, and watched the long line of carriages cross the open country and draw near.

Alas! for human expectations. Dick had arisen from his seat, and advanced to the ticket-office. He had demanded his ticket and—his purse was gone. The loss must have been a recent one, for he had had money to pay for his luncheon; but what of that? There were miles of road behind, at any point of which it might be lying; and, moreover, he had loitered about the station, and had had a nap upon the bench. Oh, there was no saying where that well-worn leather pouch might not be by this time! It was gone, and gone when his

need was sorest; and as the poor lad turned away his face from spectators, he could hardly bear to think of all that such a loss meant. Had it only happened where he was known? Here, in this strange place, no one was acquainted with him, no one would trust him; he had made a feeble attempt, and had been told as much.

But go back? Never!

It is not our purpose to follow the ill-fated young man throughout the remainder of his course; suffice it to say, that with the indomitable, dogged persistency born in Scottish people, he, even he, only half a Scot, and with little else of the rugged characteristics of the nation about him, held manfully to the task he had set before himself. He pushed on, and by dint of getting an occasional lift in a gig or cart, reached Glasgow about noon on the second day. The feat was accomplished; the reward at hand.

Nancy Irvine was still at the house of the worthy and hospitable Mr. Andrews. There had been a scene, as there was likely

to be, consequent on the charge laid at Dick Netherby's door; there had been hot words and passionate tears on one side; sorrowful incredulous silence on the other. Nancy had been unreasonable, the sisters thought; they could not have believed she would have held so stoutly to her own opinion, in spite of what she had heard from Sandy, and of what they had reported as coming from their father. Surely their father was to be trusted, if anybody was; yet Nancy had stood out with flashing eye and scornful lip, and had defied them to prove their words. Why if so base an accusation were to be believed, why had not a whisper of it been mooted when Dick was there to defend himself? Why had they waited till the accused was many miles away before they opened their mouths?

It was a strange thing surely that then—and only then—they should all begin to speak at once. It was curious that no one had ever before chanced to perceive how—how—how little Sandy liked to see her taken notice of by—by his friend;

and how ready he had always been to get between them when he could. Yet, with all his pains, he could think of nothing to say when Mr. Netherby was at hand to answer for himself whether it were true or false. He had had to wait till—till Dick's back was turned.

"What, you were taken in—*you!*" cried the girl, withering with her look the gentle meek *Jemima*. "You who have known your brother from childhood, and are not blind, nor deaf, nor dumb; he did not impose upon me—a stranger—but it seems his own folks were more credulous. Oh, 'Sandy is not to be depended on, but father is!' Then what does father know—"

"He believed it was the truth."

It ended in this, that each day the altercation was renewed with spirit, but that each day it ended with an embrace. *Nancy* had usually the best of it, since, to confess the truth, the hearts of all three were enlisted on the side of her handsome sweetheart, and such being the case the defense



waxed daily weaker. Nancy was the attacking party; she it was who invariably opened fire, she who watched for opportunities in which to introduce the subject. She was not ashamed of her lover; she gloried in owning Dick Netherby for such. *He* unworthy! *He* unfit to make a woman happy! *He* unsteady and unprincipled! She was in the act of raising her voice to demonstrate the absurdity, the hollowness of the charge, when the outside knocker sounded a smart imperative rap, a voice was heard in the passage, a step on the threshold. The door opened, and the man she loved and was ready to defend and vouch for with her latest breath, came into her presence—drunk!

CHAPTER XXIII.

"SANDY WAS RIGHT, AFTER ALL."

"'Tis we ourselves must damn ourselves."

A TERRIBLE scene ensued.

He could not explain—indeed, poor wretch, he was too far gone to explain how little had upset him—how, weary and fasting, he had yielded to the temptation of "a glass," the offer of a friendly carter with whom he had fallen in by the way—how one glass had led, as it always does lead, to another, sense and recollection receding even farther and farther into the background with each, until only the one idea was left in his besotted brain—to get to Nancy.

He could not, in the state he now was, when reeling into the little room wherein she sat, perceive what manner of glance she cast upon him. He could not see that



horror filled her eyes, and that the blood forsook her cheek,—and he approached, nothing doubting.

But Nancy stepped backwards.

He spoke, unaware of the thick utterance, the clogged syllables, which would alone have betrayed him. He drew closer to her side, stretching out hand and arm, and only then, only when she flung him off as though polluted by his touch, did it seem to him that there was anything amiss.

Polluted, indeed, the unhappy girl felt herself to be. All her pride, her valor, and her fortitude gave way before the dreadful truth, and clinging to her trembling companions, Nancy called on them to witness her renunciation.

The three had been by themselves in the parlor when Dick Netherby appeared. He left them there, driven out from their presence, and it was not for some hours afterwards that he knew what he had done.

He knew what he had done when no human power could undo it. He could

sufficiently understand what must have passed to perceive that all was over; he could dimly recall words that had passed, which could never be unspoken, and behold, as in a vision, the flowers he had gathered to deck his sweetheart's bosom, thrown upon the floor by her hand, and trampled upon by her foot.

Hope fled; but in its place there arose another passion—somber, vehement, terrible. He had caught an expression—it was Nancy Irvine's opening remark, it was also her final one—"So," she had said, "Sandy was right, after all."

"Sandy was right, after all." Wherever he went the words haunted him, whatever he looked upon was branded with them. They had been the warrant for his doom.

It may be thought that the girl was hard upon her lover; but our readers must bear in mind the curse which drink has proved to the Scottish people, the frequency with which the young who, out of mere thoughtlessness or love of company, indulge in occasional inebriety, develop with mature

years into habitual drunkards, and the sensitiveness with which the more highly principled and conscientious peasantry shrink from all contamination with the loathsome vice.

Nancy knew what she was doing, and, brave girl, she was resolved to do it. She might weep, she might sob and wring her hands together in agonies of grief and shame, as she saw all her lately-found happiness vanish into thin air, disappear as a puff of thistledown on the breeze; but she never flinched.

Dick Netherby had claimed her heart, and she had surrendered it willingly,—and then he had dared to force his way into her presence in a state that made the intrusion an insult. Oh, she had seen others like that before now. It was not new to her the uncertain gait, the inflamed eye, the maudlin tongue. She could not affect ignorance; she was only too well aware of what such things portended. Another might, by prayers and promises, have been wrought upon to forgiveness, have been

persuaded to overlook the past; but not so Nancy Irvine.

She found the scattered flowers which her own hands had cast away—the poor pretty scentless wild flowers which had been culled from tangled hedgerows for her bouquet. She picked them up one by one, and bade the wondering girls thrust them in the fire below, and never speak to her of the giver or of the gift again. She acknowledged then and there, the mistake into which she had fallen, speaking slowly and distinctly as she begged that father and brother might be informed of what had now taken place; and then, with stately step, she ascended the staircase, passed the window on the upper landing where she and Dick had stood together, where she had been almost wooed and almost won, and entered the sacred retreat of her little chamber. Let us leave her there alone with her sorrow—leave her on her knees before her God, anguished and agonized, but stretching forth her feeble hands to take hold of the Eternal Stronghold—not the

first, nor yet the last, who has been tried, as by fire, for the perfecting of the spirit.

But Dick went home, grimly bent on mischief. He had, as soon as he was sober, sought a former acquaintance, explained easily that he had been "on the spree," and borrowed sufficient money to carry him back to the Port. His friend was not sorry to see him go. His words and looks were curiously at variance. He laughed and rattled; but he had an ugly expression, somehow. And then, as Mr. Netherby wished to be off, what was the use of trying to hinder him? Mr. Netherby made no secret of his wish; indeed, every minute now seemed an age, every energy wasted until it should be put forth upon the scoundrel who had blackened him, until he could show what power should be left for Sandy Andrews ever again to drive a man to despair.

A muttered curse broke from his lips as the train, a slow and stopping one, dallied by the way. Even as it went along he

moved uneasily backwards and forwards in his seat, as though by so doing he could force a faster pace, whilst at every halt his head was thrust from the window, and his eyes, with savage ire, took in the number of passengers on the platform, the while his furious impatience chafed impotently because there were so many. It seemed as though the train would never start after each inevitable stoppage. The way was almost interminable.

At length the names on the placards of the little wayside stations began to grow familiar; he recognized the scenery—and a friend at the same time. The friend was holding converse with the engine-driver of the train, and Dick caught the latter's parting salutation—

"Aweel, I doot we mun be toddlin'," said the man, leisurely. "Are ye no for wi' us the day?"

"Ay, I'm for wi' ye," replied the other. "I'm ganin' the length o' Girvan wi' ye. I'm for the Port, an' my bit gig's to tak' me ower. Gude day; I'll be awa in, then,"—

as the guard's warning—"Noo, then, tak' your seats, a' that's going'!" was heard approaching in the rear.

"Here's luck at last!" exclaimed Dick Netherby to himself as the passenger sprang into his own compartment, and a sullen gleam lit up his downcast eye as he exchanged a greeting forthwith, endeavoring, in so far as it was possible, to rouse his absent energies to a realization of the present necessity for their use. "Here's luck at last!" he thought. "I don't have to wait an hour for the coach to start, and run the risk of missing my gentleman into the bargain. I shall catch him to a certainty this way; and then, Mr. Sandy Andrews—coward, liar, smooth-faced, black-hearted hound—and then, look out for yourself!"

The story is so old, so common, so dreadful, that we need not at any length recount it.

As of yore, the evil spirit coming back to the young man's heart and finding it swept and garnished, repossessed himself of his

former domain, and brought with him the still more wicked seven; and now, who that had known Dick Netherby in the days of his boyhood, who that had wished him well, and prophesied the fulfillment of all that was lacking and the reparation of all that was amiss, but would have cried aloud, and rent the very air with their amazement, had they but guessed the pass to which the wretched man had come.

He fell upon Andrews with the strength of a giant, and the work was short, scarce a sound escaping during the few minutes in which the two struggled together. Then the house was silent again, and Netherby had done as he had vowed to do.

His task accomplished, he had now no other care. That he should be summoned to account for the murderous deed, that his own life should be the forfeit of the life he had taken was, he thought, no concern of his, since that part of the business could be managed without his intervention. He would not leave the Port; he would not give people the trouble of going in search

of him, nor would he put his mother about by having a scene in her house.

It was but a little matter, to be sure; all other matters seemed little now that the one was achieved on which, during the past fevered hours, every thought had been concentrated; but all at once he had grown so thoughtfully considerate that he took into account even the convenience of the ministers of justice and Dame Netherby's nerves. He stopped to pick up a little child which had fallen into the gutter. The child was crying, and he felt in his pockets for a penny, put it into the little hand, and patted the little head.

He remembered the exact amount of the sum he had borrowed from his Glasgow acquaintance; had he been asked how much it was before, he could not have told to save his life; he noted it down carefully now, and added a request that it might be discharged immediately. A request—to whom? It did not cost him a passing emotion as he made it. He felt as if his mother would care as little as he did himself.

That done, Dick had no occupation left. The world had changed so mightily for him within the last half-hour, that the burning haste which had made him let loose deep and savage imprecations at every delay, had given place to something which was almost a yawning sense of leisure. He had so much time on his hands, that the chief consideration was how should he while it away.

The evening was bright and pleasant. He laughed to see the coach come rumbling in with its heavy load; he laughed and hugged himself to think that had it not been for the fortunate chance which had enabled him to get the start, he should still have had his revenge unsatisfied. Serenely now he watched the passengers descend. He had nothing to do with any of them. They had friends to greet, tidings to hear, parcels and packages to look after, and arrangements to bustle about, but Dick Netherby had done with all these things. He had no cause for bestirring himself, no object in taking thought for the

morrow, no needs to supply at the present. He found himself thinking of all this with a drowsy sense of satisfaction. Life and he had shaken hands, and death might come when and were he would.

But the young loiterer, who was observed to be hanging about the village street, was not to go altogether unquestioned and unmolested. The Port began to fill presently, for there was to be a meeting or lecture held in the schoolhouse, and gigs and other light vehicles began to be seen along the roads, while every now and then the rattle of wheels stopped in front of the little inn. Many of the new arrivals knew Lord Galt's gamekeeper, and were neither surprised to see him there, nor, truth to tell, to see him in the state in which they presumed him to be from his appearance and manner. He may have answered their salutations coherently—he thought he did—but they shook their heads one after another as they left him to himself, and went their several ways.

They did not care to have much to do with their friend the keeper now, consider-

ing that it would be wisest to keep clear of a youth who was too evidently unsteady, and who would not be long in even the place he had. They passed on, all except Rob M'Clintock, who, with his wife and daughter, had driven in like the rest, and who now pulled up by accident within a few yards of the spot where the miserable man had taken up his position. Dick was not perceived during the first bustle, and he might easily have slipped away had he been so minded, but to have avoided any encounter at this juncture was the last idea to have presented itself to his disordered mind. He would have wondered why he should.

There were Mr. M'Clintock, and Mrs. M'Clintock, and Meg,—it was rather interesting than otherwise. He understood perfectly for what purpose the family was there; Rob was an elder of the kirk, and as such, it was his bounden duty to be present at the meeting now about to take place. He was quite prepared to nod and smile, and heard nothing the least unusual in the

tone of the manager's voice, though the ejaculation, "Eh, dear! *can* that be Dick?" which preceded his addressing the latter, was sufficiently audible.

Rob was indeed startled, almost alarmed; he could not comprehend why a man in liquor should wear so ghastly an expression, should have such a withered, white, woful face. He scarcely knew what to say. Say something, however, he must, and accordingly, with more of difficulty and uneasiness than he had ever—with one exception—experienced before, he managed to stammer out some sort of greeting to his daughter's former suitor.

"I see you're like the rest o' us, Dick," he said, "bound for the kirk—leastways, the schule. We arena late; this clock's ower fast; 'tis but the half-hoor snack by my watch, an' the minister's no upon the road yet." ("He kens na what I'm sayin'," added the worthy elder to himself, "he's that stupid wi' drink.")

The reply he met with, however, puzzled Rob. "I thought the bell had begun too

soon," said the young man quietly. "Take care, Miss Meg," catching her arm, as her foot slipped; "the boys have been throwing orange-peel about. I have picked up several pieces," stooping as he spoke.

("He stan's straicht eneugh," internally commented the manager. "An' he speaks na that bad neither.") "You are wi' Andrews, I'm thinkin'," he said aloud. "I havena seen either o' ye, but I aye ken when ye hae been wi' him, Dick," lowering his voice, and with a sudden thought laying his hand on the keeper's shoulder. "See here, my bonnie man, I hae a word for ye. My lord and my leddy an' the haill o' them will be here the morn's morn. What? Eh, what?" for a strange strong shudder had run through the youth's frame, beneath, as it seemed, his own touch, and yet it was not shaken off, neither was he repulsed by look or speech. "What's comed to ye?" inquired Rob, in still more surprise. "What's wrang?" for the vibration had penetrated even through his horny skin, and he could not be mistaken about

it. "What ails ye, man?" he went on kindly. "I'm no sayin' onythin' aboot—aboot *yon*, ye ken,"—(the two women had walked on—) "let that be. Let byganes be byganes. We hae a' been a bit unneeborlike an' queer this while back: you yersel' hae ta'en to ill ways, I'm sair misdooten, Dick; an' as for yon chiel, Andrews—hoots, then, I'll say nae mair—I'll say nae mair. Maybe ye'll fin' him oot for yersel' some o' these days. Aweel then, just you come awa ben," shoving him gently towards the schoolhouse. "Come awa, come awa; there's seats for us a', an' books for us a', an' the Lord's salvation for us a', young man," reverently lifting his hat, and taking the opportunity for wiping his warm forehead the while. "Mind that, Dick Netherby, mind that; there's nae life ower faur gane, nae hoor ower late, nae deed ower dark—"

Again that frightful convulsive shudder. ("Deed, this is gae an' queer!" thought the manager.)

CHAPTER XXIV.

AMONG THE MOUNTAINS.

"Heaven from all creatures hides the book of Fate,
All but the page prescribed, their present state."

POPE.

"I'LL get him to the meetin', hoosom-e'er," concluded Rob, "an he'll gang hame wi' us, an' maybe hae his bit supper at the Farm. Hoots! we munna be thin-skinned; we may a' stan' in need o' a helpin' han' some time or ither; an' sae he'll be tided ower this bout ere my lord sees him. Troth, an' my lord need na ken naethin', wi'oot there's bletherin' gomereels¹ tak' pains to tell him. Aweel, let them tell him, there's mysel' to stan' to it that we was a' i' the schule the nicht."

But that was not to be.

¹ Chattering idiots.

"I can't; I tell you I *can't*," said Dick huskily. "Thank ye all the same, Mr. McClintock. I would oblige you, but—don't ask me."

It was not his lip which faltered, it was his jaw which shook, as the head was turned away; and without another word, with only a faint tremulous motion of the hand, the young man was gone.

He had awakened from his trance. How awful was such an awakening! The honest, homely, kindly words had dropped like soft oil on a frozen surface, and worked gently in. Rob's cheery, everyday voice, his encouraging smile, his companionship, had by degrees stolen inwards through the bands of brass which had bound the breaking heart.

Dick saw now. O God, what a sight! He had not courage to confront the picture. He could not await his earthly doom; purblind soul, he must rush upon his eternal one. All the bygone years flew past in view before his bursting eyeballs. All the early initiation into folly, the easy drifting

into sin, the dallying with temptation, the rapid rush to ruin.

He gazed upon his life, and he cursed the mother that bore him and himself whom she bore. He cursed her—mothers, listen!—with the grave yawning before him and eternity frowning behind. He cursed her—remembering not her blind affection, her caresses, and the tie of blood; but thinking only of her hand as pointing out the flowery paths to hell. He cursed himself that he, a man gifted with reason, conscience, and every sense and faculty complete, should have been so mad a fool as to follow such a lead. He cursed the day he was born and the day he was to die.

Faster and faster his rapid strides took him to the mountains. Mists had curled around their peaks, and were descending swiftly into the ravines beneath, as the sunlight departed. A blaze of glory was sinking gently in the western sea, and the soft south wind had covered the sky with clouds—clouds that among the moorlands had gathered into masses of vapor.

"He's awa hame across the moss," Mr. M'Clintock had concluded on the disappearance of his companion. "He's awa hame, an' fitting that he should. There's some-thin' upo' the mind o' Dick, an' it canna fin' its way oot. He's for naeboddy's company the nicht, ony hoo, that's clear. Maybe it's as weel. Let fowks abee, say I. Ilka ane mun haud his ain gait,¹ an' there's naethin' to be come at by persecution o' them."

With such reflections the honest farmer sought to quiet a lurking uneasiness which haunted him throughout the evening. Dick, he told the womenfolk, had taken the road home, and they might pick him up presently, should they overtake him by the way.

But the road Dick had taken was not the road home. The path he now pursued led him far from the flat barren moss, whose endless wastes of heathery hagg and grass afforded no means of accomplishing his new purpose. It took him across the stream—too shallow, it; up the steep bank on

¹ Hold his own course.

the other side, among the rocks, into the mists.

He neither delayed nor hesitated.

Life had no charms, but death had horrors—attendant horrors—to which, all at once, his starting eyes were opened. He could elude these if he had but time and a place. Time? So far good; no one had followed on his track—no one had raised a hue and cry whilst he was in the Port. And a place? He knew of several, could he but hit upon them,—but the thick stealthy vapors confused his recollections; turns on the hill-sides which had been from childhood familiar now came unexpectedly; where he had meant to go down, he had to go up; and at length, to his further bewilderment, he found himself obliged to traverse a stretch of moor of which he seemed to know nothing, and which proved almost interminable.

At length, however, the sheep-track along which the wanderer took his way suddenly ceased. He looked round, knew where he was, and with a cry dashed upwards. The dense atmosphere wetted his cheek and

hands, wrapping him ever closer and closer in its chill mantle; but he felt only the burning heat of haste, terror, and exultation.

He was near the end at last!

A peak—a craggy precipice below—a veil of mist to shroud the awful deed. He stands still for a moment. There is something like a tear on his cheek—something like a sigh burst from his throbbing throat. His arms are slowly raised to heaven—his eyes take their last look of earth. He leans over the edge, and drops into the gulf below.

.
“Gudesakes, man, hae ye heerd naethin’ o’ him?” exclaimed the much-perturbed manager of Castle Aird Farm, as he stood the next morning before the person whom he considered more likely than any other to be able to afford information regarding Dick Netherby. “Hae ye heerd naethin’ o’ him? An’ here was we made sicker he was wi’ you—”

“I know nothing whatever, I assure you,”

replied Rob's companion, sulkily. "He was here for a few minutes yesterday, much the worse for drink, and I very nearly had to turn him out of the house. I never knew such a fellow."

"He was yer ain freend," quoth Rob, grimly; "an' you and him was couthy enough a wee while ago. Aweel, he was seen here last. Ye'll hae to help me to fin' him."

"I'll do nothing of the sort. Excuse me," said Sandy Andrews, for he indeed it was who spoke; "excuse me, but I can't be neglecting my business at this time of day to be hunting up all my acquaintances who get lost when in their cups. Dick Netherby will turn up again, never fear. He will be found lying in some ditch by the roadside; and the less said of this last escapade of your fine young keeper the better."

"Troth, ye seem na fain yersel' to mak' muckle o't," retorted Rob, drily. "I'm thinkin' the twa o' ye hae pairted company."

“Parted company!” said Andrews, with an oath. “Time, indeed, to part company when—hark ye, farmer, I’ll tell you the truth. That young lout of a fellow took it into his drunken head to be jealous of me and a sweetheart he had picked up in Glasgow; and though ’twas I who took him there, and he comes straight from my father’s house, he is so besotted that when he finds she will have nothing to say to him, he rushes upon me all at once like a madman, and neither knows nor cares whether I’m killed or not! My head aches like anything this morning. Is it likely that I am going to bother about whether my gentleman catches cold sleeping out in the damp or not?”

He had no idea that there was anything more than this. He never knew with what fell intent the blow had in reality been given, nor that Dick had been as sober as he himself, from all but headlong fury, when it was administered. He had been alone when consciousness returned, and it had seemed to him that the first thing to

do was to make fast the outer door, and the next to go to bed. He felt sick and faint, and two facts were plain: he must not bruit abroad an affair which could not redound to his own credit; and it would not do to have a man like Dick Netherby for an enemy if he meant to remain at the Port. He must take time and digest both of these considerations.

But the temptation to tell Rob M'Clin-tock the truth was not to be resisted, coming as it did thus upon him. Rob listened, a sardonic grin upon his rugged features; but having heard all, he did not press further for co-operation in his search.

"Aweel, I mun gang my lane, then," he said. "Tam M'Whinnie, maybe, wad come gif he kenned, but he's na about."

However, others volunteered, and an expedition was set on foot. It proved fruitless. Then a second party set forth, aided now by several who had not thought it worth their while to bestir themselves before. All the Port was in a ferment presently. It seemed as though each one had

known Dick Netherby from his birth upwards. They spoke of his fine figure, his proud firm swinging gait, his mellow voice and pleasant laugh. They spoke leniently of his failings, tenderly of his misdemeanors; somehow, they spoke of him as one dead.

"He was just a bit o' a neer-do-weel," quoth one; "Dick Netherby was naeboddy's enemy but his ain, as they say. He could na' haud his way straicht, an' he hadna eneugh to do wi' his keeperin' to mak' him steady by force o' gude hard wark. Then there was thon auld harridan Marion—Gude forgi'e me for sayin' sae, an' her i' trouble—but whae's fault is't but her ain that her son is i' sic a plight the day? Ay, puir Dick—ay, puir Dick!"

Gradually silence fell upon all as they rambled on. Height after height was gained, nook after nook was scoured. Must they have to acknowledge a second failure! Would it be necessary to descend themselves for fear of being entrapped by the spreading treacherous fog which was again lowering over the glen? A council

was about to be held, but one in front held up his hand and looked back.

They knew what he meant. He pointed, and they too saw. They had found him for whom they were seeking,—and perchance not him, but It.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

“For though seduced and led astray,
Thou’st travell’d far and wandered long;
Thy God hath seen thee all the way,
And all the turns that led thee wrong.”

Hall of Justice.

AND how was it, then, that after all this terrible time, only a few brief months after, we again behold the widow’s son in the land of the living, still at Castle Aird, and still inhabiting the little cottage on the plateau? It is the mother and not the son who has passed away from the earth, and somehow, though Dick goes about soberly and in mourning—lame too, for the leg he broke in his fall from the heights will never be good for much again—yet, somehow, his poor pale face is not altogether sad, nor has his home an uncared-for neglected appearance.

Ah, Dick has learned his lesson at last.

When he lay moaning at the bottom of the cliffs—a poor dozen feet or so high, so entirely had he been cheated by the merciful clouds—when he found his design frustrated, and was compelled to wait, anguished in body and writhing in mental torture all through the long hours of the night and on and on throughout the succeeding day till evening came again—when he had to face a death of starvation, or, as the only alternative, a death by violence—then out of the depths of his despair arose at length the sinner's cry.

Shall we go on? Shall we picture the devils who tormented him, the ministering spirits who drew nigh unto him? It is not our province. We may not say more on so sacred and solemn a subject.

But it was not until the sufferer was found, and Dick learned that he was still innocent in the eye of man of his brothers' blood,—it was not till then that the poor wanderer dared to hope that his, even his, guilty stains might be washed away by the blood of Christ.

He was laid on a bed of sickness, and in the long days of leisure, and long nights of tossing weariness which followed, he had time to think. He tried to lead his poor parent to repentance also, and to have some measure of hope in her death.

And then at length Dick grew well again. But it was found that his walking days were over, and what was now to be done? An excellent idea struck Lord Galt, always the most considerate of masters, and that was to attach to the cottage a joiner's bench and workshop. Dick Netherby had on several occasions shown mechanical skill—every one about felt the need of a local carpenter—the thing was done in a trice.

Then how about Nancy? It fell out, one summer evening about three months after our hero was out and about again, that whilst Dick was busy plying his new trade, whistling over his bench, and stopping every now and then to wipe his forehead—wet with honest toil—or perhaps to give a passing sigh to the thought of his poor dead mother, or of his own dearer lost love,—

it chanced, we say, that looking up in the soft evening light, whom should he behold coming towards him but bonnie Nancy Irvine herself, and by her side the worthy homely Meg.

Meg knew all about Dick's love story. How was this?

Why, to be sure, Nancy had told her, Nancy, who had known the M'Clintocks long ago, and had spoken of them to young Netherby in Glasgow, but had learned to drop the subject; he had not cared for it, she saw. However, one must take one's opportunities as they offer, and with her whole heart now gone out towards her rejected lover, whose repentance and reformation were known to be sincere and abiding, and with no other way of reconciliation open, the M'Clintocks' friendship made an excellent stepping-stone.

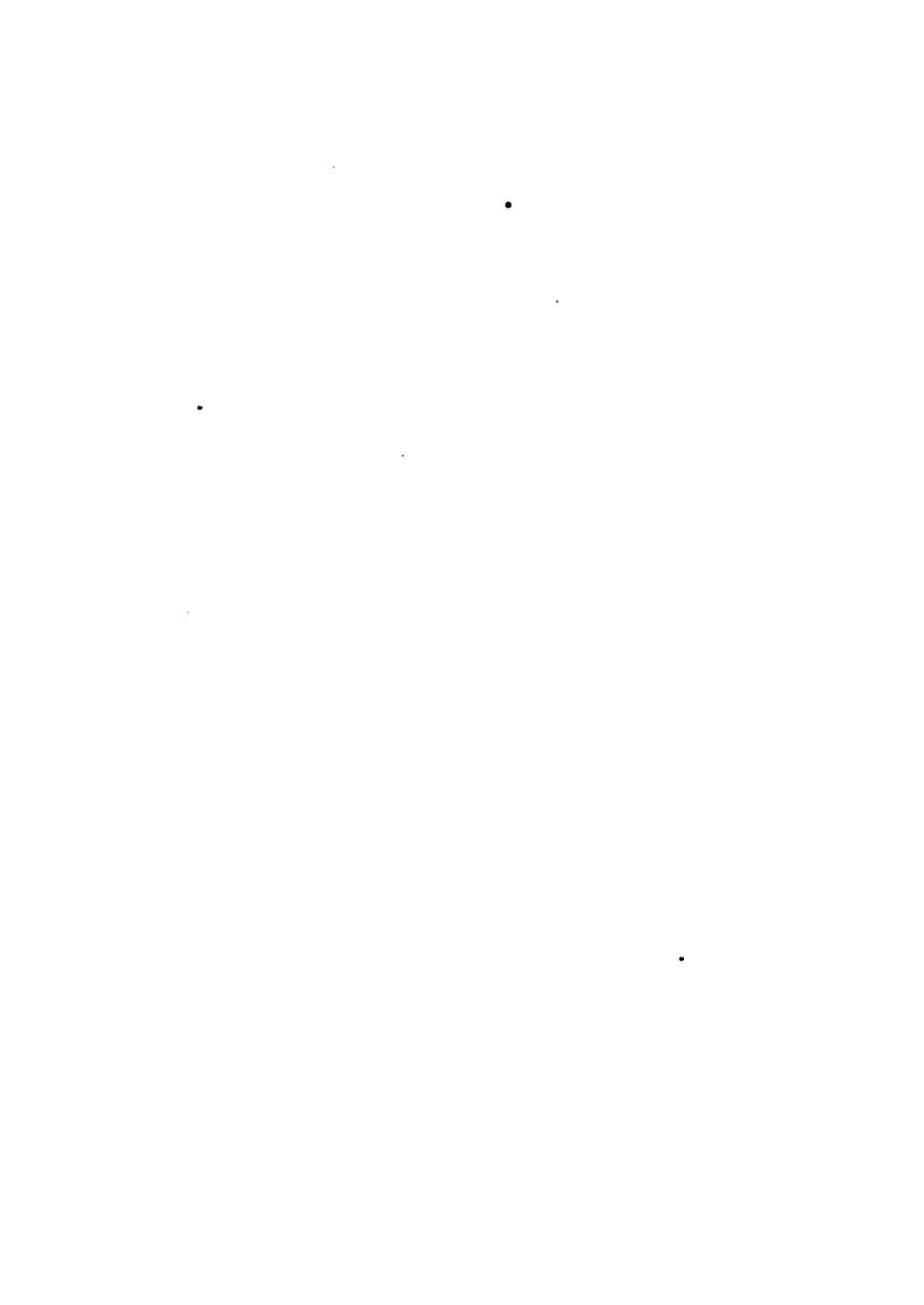
So to the Home Farm came Nancy, demure and innocent to all outward appearance,—but very soon her secret was let slip. Meg knew for what she had brought her rival up the forester's walk, and across the



little plateau where Dick was sure to be found at work. She left the two together there; she was wanted at home, she said.

“God bless her!” murmured poor Dick, looking with moist eyes after the retreating figure, which was soon lost among the trees. “God bless her and forgive me!” Then he took the hand that was half held out, “Nancy, will you forgive me too?”

THE END.



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